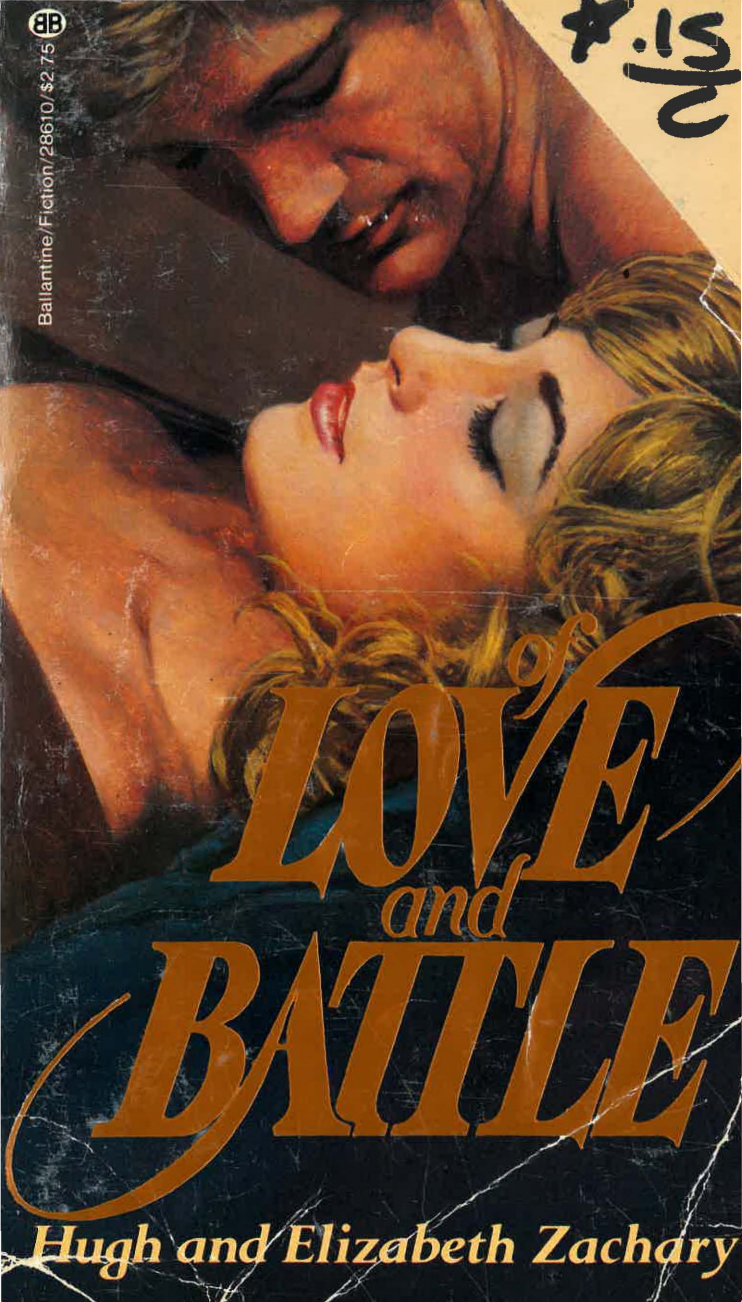


Ballantine/Fiction/28610/\$2.75



#.15
2/5



of LOVE and BATTLE

Hugh and Elizabeth Zachary

**WORLD WAR II—IT WAS ABOUT
STRUGGLE AND FREEDOM,
COURAGE AND LOVE**

About the innocent love Vivia Wilder gave to an airman on leave who taught her what to fear in a man . . . the sensuous love she gave to an admiral who taught her what to respect . . . the eternal love she promised to an Air Force gunner who taught her what it meant to grow up . . . about the love Mark Fillmore found suddenly blossoming for Liz Wilder, the girl next door . . . and another kind of love that could explode unexpectedly and throw the whole future off course.

OF LOVE AND BATTLE

BOOK EXCHANGE
1950 Canton Rd. Plaza
Marietta, GA 30066

2 1/2 .15

Of Love and Battle

HUGH and ELIZABETH ZACHARY

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

21.4
5

This book is our salute to all those who served this country from December 7, 1941, to August 10, 1945, the living and the dead. We loved you, each and every one. And, Lord, how we do remember you.

Hugh and Elizabeth Zachary

Copyright © 1980 by Hugh Zachary

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada, Limited, Toronto, Canada.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 80-68215

ISBN 0-345-28610-3

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Edition: January 1981

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHILE this book is a work of fiction, every effort has been made not to distort historical fact. Much of it was written from personal memories; and, therefore, our USO Camp Show girl might be singing, in 1945, a song that was not published until later, for those years of what Ellen Paul of the USO called "the dim and dusty past" tend to blend together in memory.

In our search for as much historical accuracy and detail as humanly possible, the aforementioned Ellen Paul, who was born in Korea and remembers another war but doesn't remember Veronica Lake, was invaluable in providing us with information about Camp Shows and other aspects of the USO during WW II.

North Carolina Congressman Charlie Rose and members of his staff were invaluable in guiding us through the maze of Washington bureaucracy. And, on the home front, Micky Hart of the Southport-Brunswick County Library showed her usual tenacity in extracting hard-to-find books from hidden places in the Interlibrary Service System.

Among the couple of hundred books that were thumbed, scanned, or devoured during the birth of Vivia and her family of characters were these of special value:

The United States Marines, The First Two Hundred Years: 1775-1975, by Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired), New York: Viking Press, 1976.

Iwo Jima, by Richard F. Newcomb, New York: Signet Books.

Tarawa, by Tom Bailey, New York: Monarch Press.

HUGH AND ELIZABETH ZACHARY

Since this work of fiction is based on historical events, the names of real people appear from time to time. And in isolated cases, the actions of real people form a part of the story.

In general, the actions taken and words spoken by men who fought in WW II are a matter of record. But some literary license has occasionally been taken in, for example, combining two separate statements into one for the sake of movement, unity, and clarity.

In one case, Corporal Tony Stein's heroism at Iwo Jima (where he was one of twenty-seven men to be awarded this country's highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor) is well documented. However, the manner of his death as described here is largely speculative.

The principal characters in this book are fictitious and most events, other than historical, are imaginary.

Contents

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Prologue | 1 |
| Part I | 9 |
| Part II | 103 |
| Part III | 319 |
| Epilogue | 429 |

Prologue

AUGUST 11, 1945

PUFFY white cumulus clouds drifted in from the sea and swelled, over the sun-heated land, into dark thunderheads. Between and around the clouds the sky was a clean and beautiful azure blue, a reflection of the deep waters surrounding the volcanic islands: the Pacific, despite its name, the largest, the deepest, the widest, the most deadly of oceans.

On a stage hurriedly constructed by Seabees, four shapely girls in top hats and tails and not much else danced while the band played "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree." Bob Hope stood to one side of the stage, slumped in tiredness, smiling when the audience whooped in approval as the four leggy girls turned and kicked.

Lieutenant Commander Liz Wilder, her fatigues sodden and sweat-soaked in the heavy air, was not watching the show. Her mind idled as she examined men's faces, the hulking clouds, the long rows of B-29 Superfortresses, their shining ranks distorted by the shimmering heat rising from the tarmac.

In provocative voices, the girls sang "A girl he met just loves to pet."

"Whooooo," men moaned in unison, with whistles, cheers, clapping, yells. A young Marine with one leg and one arm beat his only hand on the arm of his wheelchair. His eyes caught Liz's for a moment. She had to turn away. He was smiling, but there was no smile in his eyes.

The men from Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the butchered and maimed remnants, were seated up front on an area of sparse grass. She had seen that look in their eyes. Not even the knowledge that their fighting was over could alter that look. The more or less healthy men, minor wounds healed or healing, stood toward the rear, their eyes showing a numbed, disbelieving relief.

Word had spread rapidly: The *Enola Gay* flew from

Tinian, just to the south. Two bombs. There would be no assault on the Jap home islands. It was over. And they were alive.

The band riffed down and into silence. The leader stood with his head down for a moment, then raised his arms, marked the beat, and the saxes began a haunting little melody. Vivia's song.

Liz had heard the song several times. She turned her attention to the stage as Vivia appeared, the music flaring into a crescendo. The boys in the audience—mustn't call them boys, Liz, she thought; the government spent a lot of money and time making men of them—whooped, whistled, jostled for a better view, maneuvered casts and wheelchairs and crutches. That was Vivia on stage.

She had a new hairdo. No rats, no pompadour, hair long, blond, a sensual mass. As she swept toward the microphone she pushed her hair back with a slim, graceful hand. She wore the silver lamé and it was very tight, so tight that it was evident she wore little underneath. But the effect was not vulgar, only beautiful, glamorous.

The sky was now more than half hidden by the clouds. A shower moved toward them from the far end of the long runway, fat drops scouting in advance to splat and steam on the tarmac. Vivia's strong, throaty voice rose above the sound of rain. *"How sweet you are, how sweet you are."*

A characteristic Brown ending, brass swooping up over the softness of reeds to fade into the roar of approval.

"Fellas," Bob Hope said, holding out a hand toward Vivia, "Miss Vivia Wilder."

Whoops, whistles, yells of individual voices lifting out of the roar of three thousand throats.

"You want more?" Hope asked, beaming, knowing the answer.

"Oh, baby," yelled a corporal in the wheelchair nearest Liz. "Oh, yes, baby."

Vivia showed cleavage as she bowed and smiled. Frantic whistles, yells. Rain pounded on the huge wings of the B-29's and ran in rivulets down the gleaming surfaces.

Vivia lifted the microphone from the stand and walked toward the front of the stage. "You fellows are going to get wet," she said.

The answering roar told her it didn't matter.

Vivia sat on the edge of the stage. One slim leg showed

through the slit in the silver lamé. She smiled, spreading it around, looking out over the sea of faces. "Well, guys," she said. "We made it."

"California, here I come," a Marine yelled from the front row. Laughter, whistles, boos.

Vivia showed her elegant throat in a laugh. She tossed the blond mass of hair and looked up at the leader. "Les, just pick it up as we go, okay?" Brown nodded. She lowered her head and then, with one upward look, nailed the mood. Only rain broke the silence.

"For all those who didn't make it," Vivia said.

She drew out the first word of the song, sang the first few bars in that throaty, full voice before the bass man picked up the beat and came walking in under, drums joining with only brushes.

"You'd be so nice to come home to."

The last time Liz had seen Vivia perform, the song was not a part of her act. Liz lit a cigarette. One fat raindrop dampened it in the middle. The audience was hushed, hearing in Vivia's voice something that silenced the whistles and hoots. To Liz, it was evident that the song had a special meaning for her sister.

"I know," Liz whispered as the piano joined, a muted trumpet ran little melodic riffs. "Darling, I know."

The shower marched up the runway. Spattering drops were ignored by the audience. On the middle break, Vivia hung her head. The roar of the rain almost drowned out the accompaniment, leaving Vivia's voice to stand alone "to sing of home and love."

For a long, long moment there was silence. Hope, feeling the mood, cleared his throat, looked out over the audience, tears misting his eyes. Vivia rose, nodded to the leader. On the upbeat intro she swirled across the stage, long legs flashing through the slits in the gown, a dancer's legs, much like Eleanor Powell's and almost as accomplished. Whistle, cheer, whoop, Hope grinning. The band segued into a boogie beat and the four top-hatted girls pranced out to join their voices with Vivia's, the throaty one making the flavor of the vocal group, legs flashing as brass and rhythm rolled out the tale of the boogie woogie bugle boy of Company B.

Finished, Vivia bowed low, showing that breathtaking cleavage. She ran offstage, her hair now wet and clinging, so beautiful, so blond, so very, very girl, the All-American

girl, blond as Grable or Veronica Lake, her smile as torrid as Rita Hayworth's, her legs like Powell's.

And, Liz was thinking fondly, she often acted as if her brain were as dizzy as Gracie Allen's.

"Well, here we are on Saipan," Hope said as rain ran down his ski-jump nose. "The garden spot of the Pacific." Hoots, jeers. "I had breakfast with the general." Boos. "His aides kept putting papers on his desk and he started chewing the furniture just like Howlin' Mad Smith." Cheers, boos. "I asked him what was wrong. He said his Marines were driving him crazy." Wild cheers. "He said he was getting thousands of requests from his men to be discharged here on Saipan so that they could homestead here." Groans, roars of protest.

Once again Liz was looking at faces, the faces of the living, the lucky ones, and on all the faces was that look, the numbed look of disbelief. She looked away, down the long rows of B-29's. Built for only one purpose, to bomb the Jap home islands, they were now suddenly useless, as useless as all the other metallic relics of the war that were scattered from Guadalcanal to Okinawa, as useless as the sandy, rocky islands where men had died, pointing toward the heart of the Japanese Empire. No one had even known their names before the war, and now they were emblazoned in the minds of a nation: Guam, Tinian, Saipan, Iwo Jima. Volcanic, sandy, 184 square miles of nothing, populated before the war by a smattering of Chamorros, people of mixed Spanish, Mexican, Philippine, German, and Japanese blood.

There were a few Chamorros in the audience. They had fought bravely. Early in the war Chamorro militia joined the tiny Marine garrison on Guam in hopeless resistance to the Jap invasion that came only three days after Pearl Harbor. But all those were dead or, perhaps, barely alive in some Jap prison camp.

Dear God, so many dead.

"My lady nurse," Mark had said, just before he left to join the 1st Marines for the Okinawa invasion, "I can't tell you how I know, but it's almost over. It's time we started adding up the cost."

The world was billions of years old. This war was but a moment in time. But she was mortal, her own life but a tick on the cosmic clock. She had not wanted to talk of the war that night.

"Sadly enough," Mark said, "all I can do is talk about it, because no one would print it." He'd been working, his blunt fingers making his battered old portable clack and rattle. "Everyone will be too busy celebrating our victory. They won't want to read about fifteen million dead soldiers."

"That many?" Liz asked.

"Well, it can be only an estimate," Mark said. "The bloodshed box score. Civilian dead will triple it. A generation of young men has been decimated, but that's only one factor. It will be a new world now. Take Europe. Where there were four powers there'll be only one, the Soviet Union. Britain has had it. They've been bled white by two wars. France?" He shrugged. "They used shore guns against us in the North African invasion. They'll never be able to forgive Britain and the U.S. for sinking their navy, for winning after they'd surrendered. What will happen in the Far East is anyone's guess. The Russians jumped into the war against Japan at the last minute, just to grab territory. I wouldn't be surprised to see us giving aid to Japan in a few years to build them up as a buffer against the Russians."

"Oh, Mark, surely not."

He spread his hands. "You know, there's going to be a feeling of great emptiness when it's over. Goddamn, it was magnificent at times. It was the biggest story any newsman could ever hope to cover. How do you write '-30-' to a story like this?"

"Vine-covered cottages and children," she said, with a little smile.

"I agree, but. . . ."

She tried to change his mood by letting her hand trail down the nape of his neck. "But?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I was thinking of Tony Stein."

"Iwo," she said with a shudder.

"He wasn't satisfied with issue weapons," Mark said. "He ripped a wing gun out of a wrecked fighter plane and called it his stinger. Fired it from the hip. And Bes-senger at Tarawa. He had the guts to stand up and tell Howlin' Mad Smith that the goddamned brass had god-damned goofed. Now there's a truly brave man." He chuckled. "Got promoted to major just for having the guts to speak up to Smith."

Liz fell silent. "Mark, you don't have to go this time," she said.

"It's the last one," he said. And the toughest one, he thought, but didn't say it. She didn't know the target. Okinawa was the largest one yet, the nearest to the Jap home islands, the first one with an indigenous Japanese population.

"I don't know what you know," she said. "I hope you're right about this next one being the last. I only know that you don't have to go and I'm asking you not to go. You've done enough."

"Tony Stein had done more than his share when he got his platoon off the beach with his stinger," Mark said. "But he didn't stop."

"Girls, girls, girls," the men were chanting now, Hope having finished his monologue to thunderous laughter. Vivia was back with a minor movie star more famous than she, but not nearly as beautiful. The two girls wore identical scanty costumes.

Liz could not join in the gaiety. She told herself this was no time for serious thought, but she could not block out the vision of a small, empty apartment. Home? For three years her home had been tents and officers' quarters and hospital ships.

The shower had moved on past the airfield and into the blue of the ocean. Now the air was even denser and heavier. Liz's fatigues were glued to her, showing the outline of her utilitarian GI underwear. She brushed rain from her face, feeling as if she'd just had a hot bath with clothes on. She watched as Vivia and the minor star danced, but she was thinking of a cool north wind and the chill of San Francisco under a winter fog. Home. The hills would be golden with summer, the bay blue, and the mild heat would be pleasant. After a ride in a cable car, she'd go home to the empty apartment.

"Vivia," she whispered, "I do know how you feel."

No danger of the troupe outstaying its welcome with encores. Hope had to cut things short. He had a plane to catch.

Liz directed nurses and corpsmen in taking the men back to the hospital. They were soaked to the skin and, the stimulation now ended, dead-eyed.

Liz went to her office. There was one beer left over from the surrender celebration. The beer was warm. She held

the bottle up, caught sight of herself in a small mirror. Her brown eyes were lined with weariness, her hair stringy after the rain, her fatigues sodden.

"Well, here's to it," she said aloud. Whatever it is, she thought. For, as Mark had predicted, she felt a great emptiness. She wondered if Vivia felt the same way. She'd be at an officers' club now, surrounded by brass. Yes, she'd feel it. She'd felt it while singing that song.

"You don't fight a global war," Mark had once said—and she seemed always to be remembering things he'd said—"and come out of it unscathed. Not unless you're an emotionless cretin. I don't think Vivia is that at all. Oh, she thinks the war is all fun and games designed especially for her benefit, but you can tell her what Ira Hayes told his buddy before they landed on Iwo. Ira said, 'You're going to get it, buddy boy.' And Vivia will get hers, one way or the other. When it comes it'll be doubly bad for her because she's always had things her way."

"Damnit, Mark," Liz muttered now, sipping the warm beer. "Did you have to be right all the time?"

Part One

ONE

MAY 1942

It was very warm for May. The auditorium of Golden Gate High School was packed to standing with students, parents, and relatives. Graduation was still days away and the Senior Class Awards Program was playing, with varying degrees of success, to an overheated and sweaty audience. They applauded the shy performers and yelled approval and disapproval over the selections for "most likely to succeed," "most popular," "most studious."

A sprinkling of uniforms and occasional ladders in nylon hose were the only evidence here that there was a war on, but the city was blacked-out outside. Gasoline rationing had diminished traffic only slightly, although getting used to blackout headlights that offered mere slits of light had not been accomplished without some accidents. Now most San Francisco motorists were old hands at driving under diminished light conditions. Only a few thoughtless drivers complained. The city, after all, was near the sea and therefore vulnerable. Jap subs had been sighted offshore more than once, and there was a rumor that San Diego had been shelled from the sea.

Mark Fillmore had no relatives in the senior class. He sat with the Wilders, Liz on his left and John Franklin Wilder on his right. He applauded with the rest, but his attention was not fully on the stage. His mind was working. His mind was always working. He composed headlines and leadlines for stories he would never write.

The audience cheered and applauded, he wrote mentally, because there was damned little else to cheer about.

The news was grim. All over the world the Axis powers were having everything their way. Japan was within striking distance of Australia and on the eastern frontier of India. German submarines were sinking allied ships in shocking numbers. The Russians had been bled to exhaustion, with German armies deep inside the USSR. In North Africa the German genius, Field Marshal Erwin

Rommel, had the British pushed back to the edge of the Nile delta.

Yes, it was damned grim, and only a few knew how grim. Only a few people outside the government and the armed services knew the full extent of the damage done by the Japanese Navy and Air Force during the first days of the war. Mark Fillmore was one of the few who knew, from inference and some solid information, that the Pacific Fleet had almost ceased to exist at Pearl Harbor. Mark observed the war from the foreign desk of the *San Francisco Chronical*. He was a young man for the job, just turned thirty, but he had a reputation in the profession. His editorials on the lack of U.S. preparedness had been quoted before committees of Congress and entered into the *Congressional Record*. Once he'd been questioned by an FBI agent who'd wanted to find out how Mark knew that certain units of the army were training with wooden guns.

Mark came out of his musings when a male quartet sang "Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby." Eighteen-year-old boys just finishing high school, they were men in the eyes of draft board personnel. Already there were holes in the ranks of the senior class because boys had dropped out to enlist.

Mark forced himself to smile when Liz tugged his arm and pointed toward the stage. The band, composed of members of the school marching band and doing a creditable job, was swinging an intro as the student emcee said, "And now, here's our Homecoming Queen." The band played a fanfare. "The girl who was voted 'Most popular,' the stalwart leader of our cheerleaders . . . ladies and gentlemen, Miss Vivia Wilder."

"Vivia?" Elizabeth Wilder asked, leaning in front of her husband to look questioningly at her older daughter, Liz. Liz smothered a giggle. Vivian Ruth had warned her to expect a surprise. She supposed, as Vivian came sweeping regally onto the stage with a presence surprising in one so young, that "Vivia" was the surprise. Apparently Vivian Ruth had decided she didn't like her name. Well, Liz thought, Vivia Wilder had a certain ring about it.

Vivian Ruth Wilder, now Vivia Wilder, just eighteen, was dressed in a long taffeta evening gown. She was a leggy girl, the combination of slenderness and plush curves making her one of the lucky ones. She would not bloom

swiftly, then fade early into plumpness and middle age. So leggy, so naturally graceful, her very blond hair pompadoured in front and pulled in at the sides, her brown eyes spectacular in contrast to the light hair, she used very red lipstick and her eyebrows were plucked into a perfect line. Liz sneaked a look at her father.

"Nice girls," John Wilder often said, "do not pluck their eyebrows."

There was applause as Vivian Ruth walked confidently to stage center. She'd always been a confident girl, no trace of nervousness ever as she starred in the high school plays and sang solos in the glee club. The band tapered down from the introductory fanfare, a bass began walking, horns picked up a bouncy riff. Only one thing about Vivian belied her poise, and only Liz saw it. When Vivian looked back toward the wings there was just a hint of questioning on her face. And then, with a flare of arms and a toss of hip, she blazed a smile. The music began a rocking beat.

"Ayeeeeeeee," she growled in her throaty voice, as the band waited and the bass walked behind her, "just called up to tell you that I'm rugged but right."

"Vivian Ruth," gasped Elizabeth Wilder. Liz groaned and sank down into her seat, looking up at Mark, who grinned as Liz rolled her eyes in an expression of helplessness. There were gasps of shock from women in the audience, some of whom had heard the song, a song no decent girl even knew, much less sang.

Vivia sang about a wild, larcenous gambler who drank every night.

A sax player in the band got a fit of giggles and missed a note, but the rest of the group rocked right along. From the wings, a female arm beckoned furiously. The brass growled in gutty riffs behind Vivia's throaty, hefty voice, a voice that seemed so out of place with her soft, cuddly blondness.

The girl in Vivia's song ate steak, and the implied question was how could she afford it?

Boys in the audience roared. Women gasped and whispered. Vivia was moving with the beat, getting into it well, hips doing things under the taffeta that had not been taught in Madame Lazaar's School of Dance.

"Can you imagine the conspiracy, the secret rehearsals

that went into this?" Mark whispered into Liz's ear. She giggled.

Vivia was in her glory, her smile a sunray, white teeth gleaming, hair tossing as she moved enthusiastically and sang about being cooled by a fan while a man played with her feet.

Liz saw that her mother had hidden her face in her hands. Her father was sitting very straight, his face expressionless except for the working of a jaw muscle.

The song lifted to a climax as the lyrics recapped the sins of the girl who was rugged but right.

The trumpet assayed a Cootie Williams growling run and hit it on the nose. The band soared on the running beat, and Vivian Ruth Wilder sallied away from the mike, did a convincing series of bumps and grinds that brought a groan from her mother, who was peeping through her fingers, and a yell from Miss Prudence, the senior class advisor and teacher in charge of the awards program. Miss Prudence was trying to get the attention of the boy in charge of the curtain pulls, but he had his eyes on Vivian, a wide grin on his face.

Miss Prudence ran across the stage to a roar of laughter and seized the curtain pull herself. The band, seeing that it was all over, went into the closing instead of a repeat of the chorus and with Vivian swirling, the curtains closed to catcalls, whistles, jeers, and a roar of approval for Vivian. The roar went on long after the curtains clapped together and began to fade into laughter when someone on the stage tried to find the curtain opening, making bumps and bulges and getting calls of encouragement. But it turned out to be only Miss Prudence, her hair pulled back severely, face stern, on the point of frustrated tears.

"We can't hear you," someone shouted, as she opened her mouth. At the laughter, she gave an audible sob and fought her way back through the curtains. She came back through the opening with a mike that squalled and squeaked until she put it down with an amplified, metallic thump.

"We want Vivian," a group of boys began to chant.

"Please, please," Miss Prudence begged. She waited out the chanters and then said, "As a matter of fact, Vivian Ruth has asked me to allow her to come out . . . and apologize."

Vivian did not fight to make her way through the cur-

tain. She came from the wings, looking as if she'd been onstage for most of her eighteen years. Miss Prudence clasped her hands behind her back and stood aside. Vivian pushed her hair back from her forehead.

"Thank you," she said, with that blazing smile. The audience went silent. "Thank you for liking my song."

It was, Liz knew quickly, not to be an apology.

"It encourages me in my ambition to join a U.S.O. camp show and travel overseas to bring joy to the boys," Vivian said. The boys in the audience whooped.

"You can bring joy to me anytime," one yelled.

Vivian swept away, throwing kisses back at them. Miss Prudence wrung her hands in abject defeat. She wondered what would happen next. There was a rumor that the boys in the senior class were going to do the camel walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. Oh, God. What was the world coming to?

When the program was over Liz held onto Mark's arm and they followed her parents from the auditorium. She wore a pillbox hat, brown hair carefully piled underneath to show the nape of a long and slender neck. She had splurged her last pair of silk stockings on the event and God only knew when she would find another pair. Her dress was light tan, fitted at the waist, flaring into a full skirt. Her figure was accented by padded shoulders and ruffles at the throat.

John Wilder, looking grim, faced her in the hall. "When you see that young lady," he began.

"Now, John," Elizabeth said, "I know you're angry—"

"I am not angry," he said. "I am infuriated."

"Actually, it was sort of cute," Elizabeth said, looking toward Liz and Mark for support.

"That is the problem," John Wilder said. "You"—he looked at Liz—"and you, both of you think everything that young lady does is cute."

Liz found herself joining in, as usual, in defense of her younger sister. "Look at it this way, Dad. You're the father of a legend. They'll be talking about this for years."

"And what's all this about joining a U.S.O. troupe?" John Wilder asked.

"Just youthful talk," Elizabeth said.

"They're growing up fast," Mark said. "When F.D.R. said this generation had a rendezvous with destiny, he was talking about the Depression generation, but it applies

more fully to this one. Those boys up there on the stage will be in training camps in a few weeks, Mr. Wilder. Girls like Vivian feel that. They're part of it too. It's their friends and school sweethearts who are going to fight this war."

John cleared his throat. "Well," he said. He respected Mark Fillmore. He couldn't think of another man Mark's age who was as sensible as Mark. But John would not admit total defeat. "I'll have a word with that young lady." He shrugged. "Well, Mark, can we give you a lift?"

"No," Mark said. "It's such a nice night I thought I'd walk a bit."

"Not alone, I hope," Liz's mother said archly.

"She never gives up," Liz told Mark.

Her mother smiled. "If I were your age and single he wouldn't walk alone."

"Actually, I hate walking alone," Mark said.

"I hate walking, period," Liz said, "but since you've asked me so nicely."

She watched her mother take her father's arm and start off toward the parking lot, talking animatedly. At forty-two, Elizabeth Wilder was a very attractive woman. It was easy to see where Vivian Ruth got her looks. Mark offered a Lucky and Liz declined. He lit up and they went down the front steps. There was a casualness, an old easiness between them. Mark was older, thirty to her almost twenty-two, but Liz had known him from the time he was in his early teens and took a six-year-old girl for rides on his bike. Before that, really, for the Fillmores and the Wilders had lived next door to each other before Mark was born. Mark Fillmore was the big brother she'd never had. Once or twice, as when he had vetoed, in no uncertain terms, her dating a certain boy, she had felt that he took too much of being a brother upon himself.

The crowd was thinning out. A group of young boys were sneaking smokes on the lawn.

"Bomber's moon," Mark said, looking up at the full moon. "We'll be hitting them soon. It can't take much longer."

"Not the war tonight, Mark," Liz said. "You're always so serious."

"And you're not?" he said. She didn't answer. "That's why you're in nurses' training, because you're not a serious person."

"Well, the war scares me," she said. "So many boys I know are already gone, others leaving every day."

"Anyone who isn't scared doesn't know what's going to happen," he said. They were walking slowly. She put her arm easily in his, feeling so comfortable with him. "You're almost finished with your training."

"A few more weeks, a few more minor and major scrubs, and I'll be a real-life surgical nurse," she said lightly.

"What then?"

"I can stay in the hospital where I'm training. I've been offered a job."

"Is that what you want to do?"

She laughed. "No, I want to go with Vivian Ruth and bring joy to the boys."

Mark joined her laugh. "If anyone can do it, she can."

As if summoned, Vivian came running down the steps behind them. "Hey, wait up, you guys." They turned. Vivian's face was flushed, her chest heaving from running.

"No date?" Liz asked.

"He had to go home and change. I'm going to meet him downtown. You guys walking that way?"

"We will be honored to have the company of a star," Mark said.

"Lucky you," Vivian said. "Hey, was I all right?"

"You aged Mother and Dad ten years," Liz said.

"But how was it?" Vivian persisted.

"I saw ten talent scouts making notes," Mark said.

"You think you're being clever," Vivian said. "Well *ha* to you."

"Vivian Ruth," Liz said. "What is the meaning of that *ha*?"

"Just *ha*," Vivian said.

"Vivian Ruth," Liz said firmly.

"Well, smarty pants," Vivian said, giving Mark her blazing smile. "There just happened to be someone there watching me."

"Explain," Liz said.

Vivian's eyes were dancing with excitement. "It's true, Liz. Honestly. He's going to put together a troupe, you know? He's going to go out and put on shows at training camps and all over, maybe even overseas. He said he'd come and catch my act." Her smile faded. "Do you think he did?"

"I have no idea," Liz said. "Have you talked this over with Mother and Dad?"

"Oh, you know what they'd say," Vivian said.

"But you won't let that stop you, will you?" Mark asked.

Vivian changed the subject. "I love the fog, don't you?" One of the city's famous peasoupers had rolled in from the sea and was gradually eating the city into a dimness. It closed them in, making the city seem more cosy.

As they neared the downtown area they began to encounter more and more people, many in uniform. The war was only seven months old, but San Francisco was already known as a prime liberty town, the last fling town for Marines, soldiers, and sailors who drank and hoped for one last romantic adventure. For many it would have been their first. They roamed the streets until the late hours, often in groups, drinking, dropping money on the streets so that youngsters took to making nightly patrols for dimes and quarters, halves and nickels, and even an occasional bill.

Vivian and Liz got their share of whistles, even though Vivian, having changed into pleated skirt and sweater and saddle shoes, looked younger than eighteen.

"Where are you meeting the lucky boy?" Liz asked.

Vivian named a nightclub not familiar to Liz.

"That's a pretty rough place," Mark said.

"Now don't you start, Mark Fillmore," Vivian said. "You're Liz's big-brother image, not mine."

"All the same," Mark began, as a cable car came up the street.

"This car goes right past," Vivian said, running to leap aboard. She leaned out the door and waved. "Don't worry, all the kids are there."

"And a lot of Marines and sailors," Mark said, as the car rattled away.

"Well, Vivian can take care of herself," Liz said, not without some doubt. They walked in silence for a while. "Mark, do you think we should go and—"

"She'll be with her high school friends," he said. "She'll be all right."

A group of freshly scalped boot Marines came down the sidewalk arm in arm. They were singing the "Marine Hymn," all gung ho and proud of their new uniforms. One tipped his hat and smiled. Mark turned to watch them.

"I wonder how many of them will be alive by the end of the year," he said.

"Oh, Mark."

He lit a cigarette and puffed moodily. "Two thousand died at Pearl. Thousands in the Philippines, and it's only beginning. More of their young men than ours will die because, once we get organized, we'll be the best armed nation ever to fight a war. But we'll be attacking fortified positions. They'll have had a couple of years to dig in. We'll send our young men, men like those, right into the muzzles of machine guns."

"Oh," she said lightly, trying to get him off the subject, "everyone says we'll lick the Japs in a year and then go after Hitler and Mussolini."

"Yeah, just like Robert E. Lee was going to take the high ground at Gettysburg with one rush, the Napoleonic assault," Mark said. He flipped his cigarette away. "Old Lee thought he was right. Just as our generals will think they're right. For twenty years we've let the army and navy rot. We've doled out just enough money to keep a token force. And now that the Japs have had the audacity to sink most of the Pacific Fleet in one attack, we're fighting mad. We'll gather up every eighteen-year-old in the country, give him a suit and a gun, and then we'll mount Napoleonic assaults on every Jap and German fortified position from here to Tokyo and Berlin."

"Listen, big brother, if you're going to continue I'm going home," she said.

"Okay. Could you do with a drink?"

"Nice."

"I know this little place," he said with a grin. "It's a favorite with Marines and sailors."

"You fake," Liz said. "You're concerned about her too."

"It's over on the east bay," he said, ignoring her remark.

TWO

THERE was the cutest sandy-haired lieutenant (jg) on the cable car. Vivia—already she was thinking of herself as Vivia—didn't see him at first. The car was crowded and she had to stand. She was remembering how nice it had sounded when she was introduced. "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Vivia Wilder." Gee, it sounded good. Vivia. Vivia Wilder.

She saw him when the car stopped and some people got off. He had a seat. He was older, of course. His uniform, dress whites, was so neat and well pressed. He had the dreamiest blue eyes and when they met her own eyes she had to look away quickly, flushing because she'd been staring. Then when the car stopped again and more people got off, he was looking at her again. He smiled. She smiled back, not such a big smile as to give him ideas, just a polite smile for one of the fighting men. He stood and motioned for her to take his seat.

"Oh, no," she said. "I wouldn't think of it. Nothing's too good for our boys in the service."

"That's good," he said solemnly. "That's very good. Think of it all by yourself?"

A bit miffed, she tossed her head and turned her back to him. A bit later she felt a tug at her skirt and quickly brushed her hand down to contact his. She turned. There was now an empty seat beside him. He pointed, smiled. She hesitated for a moment, but she was the only one left standing and it seemed pretty silly to continue doing so.

"Aren't you a bit young to be out alone?" he asked, with a sort of Errol Flynn smile.

"Old enough, thank you," she said stiffly. She wished she could have come up with a more clever remark.

"Sixteen," he said.

"It's really none of your business," she said loftily, "but I'm eighteen."

"And I'm Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr."

"Hello, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.," she said. "How are Eleanor and the rest?"

"I'd give a quarter if you'd introduce me to your big sister," the lieutenant said.

He was a pilot. She saw the proud silver wings on his chest. He wasn't wearing any ribbons, but that was the way some of them were. They wouldn't wear their medals or ribbons in public.

"My big sister doesn't date sailors," she said.

"Too bad." He grinned.

"We have this deal, my sister and I," she said, blazing a smile at him, her sophistication having been challenged. "She gets all the soldiers and Air Corps men. I take the Marines and the navy."

"You don't look tired enough," he said.

"Well," she said. Now, that was getting a little smutty. She did not smile. She looked away. The cable car was nearing the nightclub where she was to meet her date and the other kids.

"I wish you *were* eighteen," he said. His voice was so nice. He was, she guessed, from somewhere in the Midwest. He sounded a lot like Elmer Davis on the news. She was interested in accents, with so many men from all over the country pouring into San Francisco. She was also an expert on recognizing the insignia of rank of the various services. She had a bit of trouble with admirals, but then one didn't see too many of them. And they were all so old, anyhow. She could spot the silhouettes of the various enemy aircraft, having taken a volunteer plane spotter's course. She'd never seen a Jap plane, of course, but she was sure she could spot one immediately.

"I am eighteen," she said firmly.

"I believe," he said. "I believe, because, God help me, I've fallen in love with you."

"I'm so sorry," she said, putting on a Bette Davis face. "I'm already married." She gave him a sad smile, touched his sleeve. "He's in the navy, as a matter of fact, a full captain."

"Win a few, lose a few," he said. His grin was contagious. "What's his ship?"

"A slip of the lip can sink a ship," she said. "You should know better than to ask."

"Oh, yes," he said. "Would you like to know the name of my ship?"

She shushed him with a finger to her lips. "Tojo might be listening," she said.

"Tojo already knows," he said. "He sank my ship. I was on the *Lexington*."

"Oh, no," she whispered. God, sometimes she wished she'd been born a boy. Those stinking Japs. Oh, how she'd like to go out there—"But you're all right," she said.

"Sure, sure."

"Was it really bad?" she whispered, eyes wide.

"For some," he said. "I was in the air when she was hit. I had to ditch and was picked up by a destroyer and here I am, waiting for another carrier to be built for me. They've promised me one soon."

"I'll bet a lot of your friends were killed," she said, feeling real horror.

His eyes changed. She got the message. "Let's talk about your big sister," he said.

"Hey," she said, suddenly remembering something. "I've got this good friend. Actually, he's my best boy friend." She giggled. "Not boyfriend, just friend. He's going to join the navy and fly. He's nice. I know he'd love to talk with you."

"Sure," he said, looking away.

"We're all going to this club," she said. "They have a swell band. You could talk to my friend."

"Will your big sister be there?" he asked.

She made a face. "The truth is my big sister wears braces, has rickets, and smokes a waterpipe. Why don't you join us for a while?"

"Okay, but only if you'll promise me a dance," he said.

"Oh, sure." She beamed. "All a part of keeping up the morale of our fighting men." She looked up as the car clanked to a stop. "This is it."

"Said General Mac when the Japs hit the Philippines," he said, rising with her. He wavered getting off the car and she knew he'd been drinking, but he seemed to recover quickly.

She'd been to the club only a few times and she knew that if her father found out about it he'd ground her for weeks, but the band was good. She always went there with a gang of the kids and she saw no reason why she shouldn't be allowed to go where there was good music. She was, after all, the best dancer in school. She enjoyed the attention she got from the Marines and sailors. They stayed mainly around the bar and cut in only on her dances. But she brushed off passes easily. A girl learned fast in wartime.

"By the way," she said, as they went toward the entrance. "You do have a name?"

"Terry."

The gang was congregated around the bandstand. The band was six reeds doubling on sax and clarinet, four trombones, four trumpets, bass, piano, and drums. It sounded larger in the small room. The boy from the school band, the one who had done the trumpet growl during her number, was sitting in for one of the regular musicians, as he did frequently. He saw her and nodded his trumpet at her. She waved. They were playing Tommy Dorsey's "Well Git It," and the music went straight to her feet. The place was packed. She took Terry's hand and led him onto the dance floor among the frantic jitter-buggers.

"Oh, baby," he said, pulling her off the floor, "You've got the wrong man for that jive."

A few of the gang were gathered around the bandstand. She stood there until the trumpet section blasted out the ending. "Hey gang," she said. "Meet Terry." Her date, Ralph Edwards, was frowning. She moved to his side and took his hand. "I brought Terry to meet E.O. Where is he?"

"Out there," Ralph said, reassured, nodding toward the dance floor.

"Oh, God," Vivia said. E.O. was wearing his zoot suit: a long jacket with huge padded shoulders, baggy pants pegged at the ankles, and a watch chain long enough to twirl. He was absolutely and revoltingly resplendent. Short and wiry, no taller than Vivia, he was the class clown. He was a leader as well. When people looked at E.O., they smiled. She smiled, seeing him, puffing from the exertion of gitting it.

"You and I, Vivian Ruth," E.O. had told her more than once, "are a cut above the ordinary. We're leaders."

She really hadn't seen herself that way, but she didn't object to the idea.

"I mean it," E.O. had said. "Come with me and we'll prove it."

She was sure she'd never be able to think of Ernest Orville (E.O.) Gardner for the rest of her life without remembering. It was between classes. They were going to be late for their next class because E.O. had insisted on leaving the school to go to a dime store where he purchased monogram initials, which he pinned carefully to

the ankles of his socks. E on one ankle, O on the other. Within days the fad was taking hold. Soon almost everyone in school had initials on his socks. Vivia, not to be outdone, appeared several days running with a few colorful feathers stuck into her hair behind her ear. Soon it was feather time.

Yes, E.O. and Vivian Ruth were leaders.

Now, E.O. didn't spot Vivia and Terry until after the dance. He came puffing up, and spotted Terry's silver wings.

"Reet," E.O. said. "Gimme some skin, man." Terry shook hands. He was a head taller than E.O. and he was looking at E.O. with real doubt.

"Gimme the scoop, man," E.O. said. "'Cause soon as I quituate I'm goin' flyin'." He demonstrated, using the wide brim of his zoot suit hat for wings. "Really, man," he said, coming back. "I'm for real. Got my papers all signed and sealed. Save me a F-4U."

"Well," Terry said diplomatically, "a man can do anything he sets his mind to." Fortunately for him, the band saxed into a Millerish "Blue Rain." The hugging music split up the gang into matched pairs and, with a look of determination in his eye, the lieutenant took Vivia's hand and pulled her into his arms. He danced well. She did what her sister Liz laughingly called the teenager's contortion, pulling her pelvic area back to avoid contact. She followed his lead without having to think about it, smelled a hint of aftershave. Ralph, her date, stood sullenly beside the bandstand. A Marine, a bit wobbly on his feet, tried to cut in.

"Shove off, gyrene," Terry said curtly. The Marine started to bluster. Terry looked him in the eye and something there caused the Marine to return to the bar.

"I won't stay around and make your date unhappy," Terry said into Vivia's ear.

"Thanks," she said.

"I'd like to see you again. Tomorrow night?"

She knew what her father would say.

"Because it may be my last chance," he said. "I said I was waiting for them to build me another carrier, but they really have some already built."

"Surely they won't send you back so soon," she said.

"The only thing we're shorter of than planes is men to fly them," he said. "Give me your telephone number."

"No," she said.

"Okay," he said, his voice cool. "If that's the way it is."

She had made her decision. "I'll meet you," she said. "Tomorrow night." She'd never done anything like that in her entire life, but then she'd never met a man who had lost a ship and gone down in the water and was going back into combat so soon. And she was a woman. She was eighteen. Soon she'd be going out into the world, perhaps even traveling overseas. There was a war on. If she could not do her part, just a little part, be nice, make an evening more pleasant for one of the fighting men, then something was wrong with the world.

"Good," he said. "Name it."

She told him about a small park near her home. Then he was gone.

"What happened to the old man?" her date asked, and she saw him suddenly for what he was, a boy, a jealous little boy.

"Oh, he was just a friend of my sister's," she said, not wanting to have to explain.

She didn't stay mad at Ralph long. She had to put the teenager's hump in her back to keep him from holding her too closely. One of her problems was that she was too emotional. She'd been told she'd make a great actress because of that. She just seemed to feel things more deeply than most people. And she had a short fuse. Like the girl in the song, she just loved to pet.

Ralph didn't object to her jitter-bugging with E.O. They were darned good. People cleared the floor for them and the band played an extra chorus as E.O., strong in spite of his small stature, tossed Vivian, skirts flying, through his legs and over his thigh and over his shoulder. The dance showed her dancer's legs well. And her every move, in spite of the frantic pace, was graceful and poised. They got a great hand. More dancing. One sneaked drink, and then walking home from the car stop with Ralph's arm around her waist, stopping where the shadows were thick, his mouth on hers, tongues probing in that new and daring "French" kiss. She pressed against him. Since nothing could happen so near home, she let go for one thrilling, ecstatic moment to know his hand underneath her sweater and bra, pushing her full, hard little breast against his hand for a moment before whispering into his opened mouth, "No, Ralph, no. No."

Liz was spending the night at home. Her door was open, her light on. Vivia tried to sneak past but saw Liz standing in the doorway motioning for her to come in.

"Your lipstick is smeared," Liz said, closing the door.

"I just washed my face," she said.

"And it caused your face to be flushed and your breath to be short," Liz said.

"Señora, ees thees thee Spanish inquisition?" she asked.

"Vivian Ruth," Liz said.

"Oh, shit," Vivia said.

"There is no need for talk like that," Liz said. "You have just had in your mouth what I wouldn't even hold in my hand. Vivian, I worry about you."

"I'm old enough to worry about myself," she said.

Liz looked at her with a little smile. "Yes, I suppose you are. Look, I'm not sleepy. Want to talk for a while?"

"Not tonight, Liz. I'm pooped. We danced a lot."

"I know, I watched for a while."

Vivia flushed. "Spying on me?" she asked, wondering if Liz had seen her with Terry.

"We merely had a drink at the bar. I saw you dancing with E.O. He is something else."

Vivia let out her breath. "Best dancer in school, next to me." Liz hadn't seen her with the lieutenant or she'd have pounced on that.

"I wish you wouldn't go to places like that," Liz said. "You know Mother and Dad wouldn't like it."

Vivia smiled.

"Ralph Edwards seems like a nice boy," Liz said.

Vivia squirmed, still feeling Ralph's finger on her breast.

"Do you always go in a group?" Liz asked.

"Sure."

"Well, be careful, little sister. Most servicemen are perfectly nice and respect a nice girl, but there are all sorts of people in uniform here now."

"Yes, Mama," Vivia said. But she knew Liz meant well. She kissed Liz on the cheek. "Don't worry, huh? I'm virgin, I'm virgin."

THREE

VIVIA awoke to her mother's coaxing, calling voice. She stretched and heard a faint ripping sound. Pajamas just a little too small. She looked for damage and found that the seam under her left arm had parted. Gee, did that mean that at last she was developing some boobs? She hopped out of bed and posed in front of the dresser mirror. She couldn't tell any difference. And it was, drat and darn, time to shave again. But the window was open and the morning was a glory, cool with that smell that seemed an exclusive property of the bay area.

She did some quick exercises in front of the open window to the rhythm of "A Tisket a Tasket," trying to make her voice sound cute and young like Ella's and hearing Chick Webb's swinging band in her mind. God, she felt great. Just great. And then it hit her, the feeling of impending doom.

Her mother called out from below with metronome regularity while Vivia continued her morning toilet. She timed her lope down the stairs to her mother's third assurance that the eggs were getting cold. Actually, they were just being put on the table.

Vivia had on her gayest front as she bubbled into the breakfast nook, that cozy, plant-filled little room with bay windows looking out over rooftops to the blue water of the bay. Her father was there with the paper. If her luck held he'd find the war news of such great interest that he'd forget to ground her before she gobbled her food and was out.

"Hi, Mom." The juice was so cold and delicious it gave her shivers. "Hey, just one egg?"

"There's a war on, dear," her mother said.

"No jive."

"No slang," her mother said.

"Reet," Vivia said, beaming at her mother, who returned a fond and foolish smile. "Liz gone?"

"She had an early call."

She settled in. Breakfast was one of her favorite meals, along with lunch, dinner and snacks. "Vivian Ruth," her

mother said, in a tone that caused her to go tense. "I don't know how I'm ever going to live down last night." But Vivia was feeling better. She knew the various tones of her mother's voice, and this one was just medium. "Whatever came over you to do such a thing?"

"What thing is that, Mom?" she asked, trying to charm her mother with her best blaze of smile.

"That horrible song," Elizabeth said. "God knows I've done my best to teach both of you girls to be ladies and where I've failed I just don't know."

"Mom, you succeeded with Liz. Half a victory is better than none." She winked. "Admit it, now. You enjoyed the looks on the faces of some of those old biddies."

If she had tried it with her mother alone she might have gotten away with it. But her father's paper went down like a flag falling to half mast, and she knew she'd gone too far.

"I didn't enjoy it," John Wilder said. "I didn't enjoy it in the slightest. And I think it was in very poor taste. If I wanted to hear trash I'd go to a honky-tonk and not to my daughter's high school."

"Yes, sir," Vivia said weakly.

It was, she decided, going to be semi-rough. She knew that from his look. It wouldn't be as rough as the night of the junior prom when she went swimming in the fountain in her formal and was taken down to the police station along with E.O. and a half-dozen others, but it was going to be pretty bad.

"The Wilder name is a respected name in this city," John said. "It has been a respected name in California since my grandfather, John Franklin Wilder—"

Vivia was anticipating the words. ". . . came west with nothing in his pack but a spade and a Bible. . . ."

"And," he said, having gone through the family history, "I do not appreciate such antics. It was an unreasoning and irresponsible display of pure poor taste."

She sopped up the last of the egg yolk with a piece of toast. It was only going to be a lecture, thank goodness.

"And what I want to know," John said, "is just how you managed it. I'm sure you had to practice it, and I will admit it was professional."

Hmmm, left-handed praise was better than none.

"You had to practice it and I want to know where, because I'm sure you didn't do it at school."

"At E.O.'s house." Good old E.O. Always good for an alibi.

"I happen to know Ernest Gardner very well," her father said. "He is a minister of the faith and a God-fearing man."

"Oh, he wasn't home," she said quickly.

"And Ernest Gardner let a ten-piece band and no telling how many more come into his house with no adult present?"

It was getting a little icky. Why hadn't she anticipated the question? One never knows, do one? And for a moment she was hearing the walking riffs of Fats Waller in her head.

"Vivian Ruth?" her father said.

Well, racklefratz. What was she, some mouse-scared-teenager or an eighteen-year-old woman? In a few days she'd be out of high school. It was high time people began to realize. She looked at her father, her brown eyes serious, her mouth straight.

"Dad, I'd like to level with you."

"I'd appreciate that."

"You remember Charles Davis, the boy who plays trumpet?"

"I know the young man."

"He plays with a band, a real band." She paused, said a quick Hail Mary—she wasn't Catholic, but she believed in hedging her bets—and said, "He plays with the band at a nightclub down on the east bay."

"A nightclub?" her mother gasped.

"The leader of the club band did the arrangement for us," Vivian said. "He's a peach. And we went there after school to rehearse it."

"After school," her father said. "Before the place was open?"

"Yes." She thought, Well, what the heck. "Most of the time." If she were going to level, she should level. She was, after all, an adult.

"Most?" His face was dark. "Vivian Ruth, you know how I feel about such places. You know you've been strictly forbidden to go to any place where alcohol is served."

"I'm not an alcoholic," she protested, using all her dramatic skills.

"And after the place was open for business," John

Wilder said. "I can only hope that you did not disobey my orders to that extent. I can only hope that you respected my wishes enough to be gone before the place was open and began to fill up with soldiers."

He was giving her an out, a chance to lie. Well, she'd had enough. She wasn't going to lie. No more. "Oh," she said lightly, "it's mostly Marines and sailors."

"Vivian Ruth," her mother gasped.

"I want to know and I want to know now if you've been going to nightclubs," her father said.

She felt as if she were poised on a high cliff. Closing her eyes, she dived into the unforgiving air. "Yes," she said. "As a matter of fact, I was there last night, with a bunch of the kids. And there wasn't a thing wrong with it."

She held her breath.

"I am," he said mildly, "most severely disappointed in you."

"Dad," she said, "I'm *eighteen*."

"And you are still my child, living under my roof. I would think, Vivian Ruth, that you could respect the rules, that you wouldn't put me in the position of having to express my displeasure in disciplinary measures."

Oh, God, she thought. The worst. The judge syndrome. When he started to sound official, with his face expressionless, his voice slow and measured, everything was going to hit the fan.

"You leave me no choice," he said. She could almost see him in his courtroom, in his black robe, dishing out reluctant justice to criminals. She bowed her head to await judgment. And then, reliving it, she heard the applause. She was standing on Rudy Blake's bandstand at the nightclub. Rudy had done the arrangement as a favor to Charles. It was hard to keep men in the band, what with enlistments and the draft, and Charles was always ready to fill in. Rudy had heard her sing and had put some finishing touches on her song for them.

"Not bad, kid," Rudy had said.

"Gee, thanks," she said.

"Look, put a little more oomph right here," he said, tapping the sheet. "Take it from the bridge and I'll show you what I mean." And there she was, working with a real professional. He wasn't as famous as Artie Shaw or

Tommy Dorsey or Glenn Miller, but he was a real musician and he knew good stuff when he heard it.

"Look, kid," he said, "why don't you stick around and try it with the big band?"

"Gee, I'd love that," she said. So she stayed. She sang the song with Rudy Blake's big band and it was the nearest thing to heaven she'd ever known. She was right in the middle of it, with the brass section and the sax section so close that when they blasted she could feel it right down to the soles of her feet. Heaven. So beautiful it filled her up and overflowed into her throaty voice.

"Kid, when you're old enough, come around," Rudy finished.

But that wasn't all, because the first night she got up enough courage to go to the club with a gang of kids Rudy Blake saw her and called her up there, with a full crowd in the place, and she belted out the song and the kids whooped and the sailors and Marines whistled and yelled for more.

She'd known real, professional applause. She'd been offered a job singing with a band. Yet here she was, afraid of being in the doghouse, as if she were a child.

"Dad," she said. "I've done nothing wrong."

"That attitude only makes it worse," he said. "Can't you admit that you have defied me? That you've broken the rules of this household?"

"Dad," she begged, "I'm eighteen. I'm an adult. It's time for me to start thinking what I'm going to do with my life. I know what I want to do. I have a talent and I'm going to use it."

"Singing suggestive songs?" he asked.

"Singing songs," she said. "I'm good at it, Dad. Rudy Blake has even offered me a job with his band."

The jaw muscles were working on John Wilder's face. "No child of mine," he said, his voice harder than she'd ever known it to be, "is going to work in a booze joint."

"Dad, please."

"If you're going to be a whore," John Wilder said, "at least be honest about it and don't try to hide your true occupation behind something else."

"Oh, John," her mother said.

"This is the end of it," he said, his eyes raking Vivian. "You will never again, so long as you're living in my house, go into a place like that. You will give up this silly

idea about being a band singer. And to give you time to think it over, you are grounded for three weeks."

"It's graduation time," she protested, feeling very much the small girl in spite of herself. "There are all sorts of parties."

"Perhaps missing something you consider important will give you time to think seriously about what to do with yourself. There are many honorable professions opening up for women. You could even be a lawyer."

"Ugh," Vivia said.

"Scorning that honorable profession," John said, "does not end the possibility." But he was, for a moment, at a loss. "Let's not overlook the fact that many of our men are going off to war. Women are being asked to fill their jobs."

"I hear they're going to start training women to be riveters at the shipyard," Vivia said sarcastically.

"At least that is honest work," he said. "Three weeks it is, young lady. You may attend only official school functions, such as baccalaureate and graduation. Is that understood?"

"May I go?" she asked. "I'll be late."

"Do you have lunch money?" she heard her mother ask worriedly. She ran out into the morning, which was not so glorious anymore, fighting back her angry tears.

All but one of her final exams were behind her. The class of '42 spent a good portion of the morning being fitted with caps and gowns and walking through the graduation ceremony. The last period before lunch was a study hall and she was sitting moodily in the library when a sophomore girl told her she was wanted in the office. She approached the office with a mixture of curiosity and dread.

"What's the story, morning glory?" she asked the girl at the desk.

"Someone to see you," the girl said, looking toward the bench that was partially hidden by the open door. Vivia turned. He was sitting on the bench in his dress whites, legs crossed, blue eyes flashing, giving her a teasing smile.

"Why," she said, "it's my cousin just back from overseas." She beamed a genuine smile and moved toward him, holding out her hands. "Cousin Terry," she said.

He took both her hands in his. "Cousin Vivia," he said. "I just couldn't wait until tonight to see you."

"I'm glad you didn't," she said.

"We have so much to talk about," he said. His hands seemed to hold an electrical charge. She could not gather enough strength to pull hers away. "Can you get out for a little while?"

It was nothing but trouble, but she was still angry and hurt. She turned to the office girl and said, "Would you ask Mr. Clive if I can be excused for the rest of the day? I don't have anything important in class this afternoon and it's been so long since I've seen Cousin Terry."

There was a war on, Principal Clive thought, as he signed the excuse slip for Vivian Ruth Wilder. She might not have too many more opportunities to see her cousin.

"Tell me all about the family," Terry was saying, as he led her into the hallway. She smothered a victorious laugh. Outside, they snickered together and he took her hand and led her on the run across the lawn to the street where a gleaming new Hudson was parked.

"Hey, great," she said, as he opened the door and she slid in, stepping down into the low car. And then he was behind the wheel. "I didn't know you were rich."

"It's borrowed," he said, "so don't stick bubble gum under the seat."

"Lieutenant Terry—" She paused. "What is your last name, Cousin Terry?"

"Adams."

"Lieutenant Terry Adams," she said, "I am tired of snide remarks from you."

He took her hand after he'd gotten the car underway. "Sorry," he said. "No more snide remarks. You are my beautiful, sophisticated lady and we have a day ahead of us. Any suggestions for a stranger in town?"

It wasn't often that Vivia had a chance at a car, and the gleaming luxury of the powerful, whispering machine gave her a feeling of great adventure. "There's the zoo," she said.

"Now there's a sophisticated, adult place." He grinned.

She jabbed him with her elbow. He grunted and then laughed.

"The beach," she said.

"No bathing suits," he said. "Unless you know a place where we wouldn't need them."

"That is evil, evil, evil," she said. "Have you seen the seal rocks?"

"No."

"'Kay," she said. She directed, and soon they stood on the cliff high above the water. The wind was from far away, carrying with it the smells of distant islands. He held her hand as the waves washed up in long, Pacific swells to crash against the rocks. The seals honked at each other and slid gracefully in and out of the water. Lunch was hot dogs and Cokes and, wonder of wonders, when Terry stopped at a small store for cigarettes, he came out with two Hershey bars.

"I didn't know you carried a gun," she said. You had to know the grocer to get chocolate bars. She took hers with eagerness.

"Nothing is too good for our boys in the service," Terry said. "It's all in knowing the ropes."

"If you're so smart, get me some silk stockings."

"Simple," he said, snapping his fingers and reaching across her to pop open the glove compartment. "Anything else, lady?" he asked, dropping two pairs of beautiful, new hose into her lap. She squealed in delight.

"I am totally fulfilled," she said, licking her fingers to get the last bit of chocolate. "But don't get the idea you can buy my love with candy bars and silk stockings."

He had found his way to the Golden Gate Bridge. Down below there was a large ship, a cruiser, she thought, making its way outward. It looked so small. She shivered, thinking of it out on the huge ocean with Jap planes and submarines coming after it.

"They must look like that when you're flying," she said.

"Add a few puffs of black all around for the ack-ack," he said, "and a couple of tons of metal whizzing around your head."

She put both her hands on his arm. "Tell me about it."

"Nothing to tell. You just do your job."

"I'd be so scared."

"So? You're scared. Makes you more alert."

"Did you ever sink a ship?"

He laughed. "Dozens of them."

"Seriously."

"I fly a fighter."

"A Corsair?"

"I've checked out in a Corsair, but we had Hellcats on the *Lex*."

"F-4-F's," she said knowingly.

"Right."

She thought of him up there all alone in a small plane with Jap planes shooting at him, ack-ack guns filling the sky with deadly black puffs. She shivered. "Terry?"

"Ummm."

"Next time you're flying will you fly over my house, low, and wave to me?"

"Sure," he said, "and get court-martialed for buzzing a populated area."

"Well."

He put his arm around her and pulled her close. "For you I'll do it, first chance. But let's not talk about flying and the war now. Let's talk about us."

"Us?"

"When I said I couldn't wait until tonight to see you, Vivia, I wasn't kidding."

He called her Vivia and it sounded so right. "What a line," she said.

"Vivia, things happen fast these days. They have to," he said, his hand squeezing her shoulder gently. His voice was so soft, almost a caress. "I didn't ask to fall in love with you, it just happened."

"Oh, come on," she said.

"You're young, Vivia. I won't burden you with my personal problems. I won't even ask if you feel the same way. And above all I won't ask you to wait for me, because you have your life ahead of you. You have your friends, and when you're young it's time for friends and dates and fun. All I ask is that you keep me company for a few days, until I ship out . . . and that you remember me. Maybe after the war—" He stopped talking.

She didn't know what to say, but she'd been touched, touched more than she would have expected. She was silent as he turned off the highway onto a side road.

"According to my unfailing sense of direction," he said "the Pacific Ocean should be over this way. When we find it I'm going to take a blanket out of the trunk. . . ."

Oh, oh, Vivia thought.

". . . spread it in the sun, place upon it a cornucopia of goodies called a picnic lunch . . ."

Well, if it was just a picnic.

". . . and spend the afternoon eating, drinking cham-

pagne, and telling you what a beautiful little bobby-soxer you are."

"I have to be home no later than four," she said.

"No sweat, G.I.," he said. "Old Cousin Terry is the soul of dependability, and it is his rule never to arouse a sleeping father."

In a spot where the road curved along the line of cliffs, Terry spread the blanket in the dry sand near the inner rocks and took off his uniform jacket. His shirt was tailored to show nice shoulders and a slim waist. Vivian ran to the sea, leaving her shoes behind, to wade in the deliciously cool water. He lay on the blanket on one elbow and waited patiently, his sandy hair gleaming in the sun. She came back and knelt on the blanket, flipping water from her fingers into his face.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"I'm always hungry at the beach," she said.

Cheese and crackers and a hunk of unsliced bologna was a banquet. She laughed when he took out two carefully packed long-stemmed glasses and let the wine bubbles tickle her nose as she sipped. She attacked the food with a healthy appetite and sipped the tart, pleasant wine. He lay there with his chin on his hand staring at her.

"You're making me wonder if my table manners are bad," she said.

"Sorry. It's so nice just to look at you."

"Terry, now cut it out."

"It wouldn't be bad duty to look at you for the rest of my life."

"Terry, that's a corny old line."

He shrugged. "What does a guy have to do to make a believer of you? You are beautiful, you know."

"Of course," she said, trying to stay light. She fluffed her hair and struck a pose. "Me and Betty Grable and Carole Lombard."

"I didn't want it to happen," he said in his soft, caressing voice. "The last thing I wanted was to fall for an underage chick just before going back into action." He rose from his reclining position and knelt in front of her. "Listen, I'm going to kiss you now. Don't be scared."

"Scared?" she asked, frightened by his seriousness.

"That's all I'm going to do, just kiss you. I've never wanted to kiss anyone so badly in all my life. Okay?"

"Okay." She laughed, extending her cheek to him. But

he put his hands on her face. They were soft and gentle and yet masculine, framing her face, making her feel so small. His lips were soft and sweet, not at all demanding. She sighed and let her lips part. Then he dropped his hands from her face, broke the kiss, looked at her.

"Oh, Vivia, Vivia," he said, and it was so real that now she was really scared, but she could not protest as his arms went around her. Kneeling, torso to torso, mouth to mouth, his hands on the small of her back, she gave him her lips and seemed to melt into him, eyes closing without conscious effort, head beginning to be just a bit light. She knew how to kiss, was considered a good kisser, but she'd never been kissed as he was kissing her, so softly, so full, so sweet, not at all like the demanding push of Ralph. It was tender and all-consuming and she seemed to grow, to burn. There was in her a vast, almost maternal tenderness.

She was lying on her back, he with his torso on hers, his arms around her.

When he broke the kiss, at last, she felt a sense of loss. "Now do you believe?" he asked.

"Believe what?" she whispered.

"That I love you, silly."

"Do you?"

"Yes," he said simply. "If I were just feeding you a line I'd be doing this." He brought his hand up quickly and squeezed her breast, taking the hand away just as quickly, before her automatic response was completed, her hand coming to find that it was unnecessary to push his away. He held her again. "I would do nothing, ever, to hurt you or make you unhappy. I don't want just a day of you, a part of you. I want all of you."

She pushed him away, sat up, fluffed her hair. "Take it easy, greasy," she said, "you're moving too fast."

"Yes," he said sadly, looking out over the sea. "But we don't have much time."

"Well," she said, starting to rise, wondering exactly what had so overwhelmed her, "it's just—too fast." But he took her arm and pulled her back to lie beside him.

"Hell, I know I promised I wouldn't ask for anything," he said. "It wouldn't be fair to you. A three-day honeymoon."

Only the time period registered with her. "Three days? So soon?"

"And then leaving you all alone, wondering for long periods of time whether I'm dead or alive. No, I won't do it."

He took her breath away again with his kiss. "And maybe even a baby," he whispered. "A little girl who would look exactly like you."

She had a fleeting picture of herself singing a torch song in front of Rudy Blake's band with an infant straddling her hip. But the thought faded into a kiss. It was, she was thinking, such a tremendous responsibility, having a man love you.

It was all too fast, her emotions too fierce. But he loved her. Yes, things moved faster in wartime. He was so sweet, so serious, so thoughtful. He loved her. And he was not getting fresh. That was what made it so right. There'd been boys who said "I love you, Vivian," all the time trying to fumble under her sweater. All she'd known before were boys.

And he was in love with her and would soon be leaving and, oh, God.

She was on her back, an arm shading her eyes from the sun, her mouth against his. He pressed against her hip. She moved away, an automatic response.

"Sorry," he said. "I can't help that. It's a part of love, Vivia. Don't blame me for wanting you. I want you for always, though, not just for now."

"Terry," she said, "I think we should leave."

"Would you at least wear my ring?" he asked.

"Oh, Terry, I don't know. I just don't know."

"Well, we have some time for you to think about it." He pulled her closer. "Now, no more talk, just some high-powered smooching." She heard the little warning bells that told her she was going past the point of no return. The champagne added to her giddiness. The afternoon passed. And then his hand was on her breast.

"Just this little thing, Vivia. That's all I ask. It's all right. It's all right. Just one kiss, here." His hand showing her, to the delight of her aroused libido, where "here" was. His coaxing, his promises, the confidence she placed in him all left her a bit frightened. But dreamy, as his hand went under her sweater, all the way under her body to fumble with the strap at the rear. There was a feeling of freedom and looseness, the sun on her tender nipples, the white-hot heat of his mouth moving from mound to

mound, delicious, wanton moments and the hard, hard awareness of *him* against her, moving to press against her stomach, feeling as she'd never allowed herself to feel before. A man's lips were kissing where none had ever been before.

And just before she started to mount one last, feeble protest, knowing she'd gone too far, he took away⁶ those white-hot lips and lifted her into a sitting position. He resnapped the bra, tenderly rearranged it over her breasts as if he were a mother arranging a child's sweater.

"Lady," he said in a hoarse whisper, "I think it's high time we got the hell out of here."

FOUR

LIZ Wilder and half a dozen others from the graduating nursing class gathered in a conference room that morning to listen to a recruiting pitch. A big, rawboned woman officer in a blue uniform—a real battle-ax—alternated with a rather handsome navy doctor in extolling the virtues of service to one's country.

The battle-ax, a lieutenant commander, spoke in a crisp, no-nonsense voice as she outlined the wartime contribution of women, stressing the Florence Nightingale tradition. "Women are going to have to do their share in this war," she said. "We women are now serving in the army, with the establishment of the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps only this month. You can take it from me that the W.A.A.C.'s will be a part of the real army, and there will also be women in the navy and the air force and even the Marines. But you people have an opportunity to get a jump ahead of all of them, because the navy needs nurses right now."

The navy doctor promised, in a Harvard accent, immediate commission to ensign, good work conditions, and an opportunity for surgical nurses to see more actual work in a month than most saw in a year of civilian practice. The lieutenant commander promised exciting travel. "We need nurses right now in the Hawaiian Islands. And as we kick the Japs back across the Pacific the hospitals will move ever eastward. Some of you might even have the

opportunity to work aboard hospital ships. And that would be exciting, for these floating hospitals are equipped with the best. You'd be working with the best doctors produced in this country. You'd get a chance to study tropical diseases. In short, you'd get more experience in a year than a civilian nurse gets in ten."

"Any questions?" the doctor asked.

"I've heard," said a student nurse, "that the Japs use the red cross on the side of a hospital ship to sight in their torpedoes or whatever."

"Well, honey," the lieutenant commander said, "if you're going to crap in your skivvies at loud noises you'd better stay stateside."

Liz joined in the uncomfortable laughter. She understood why some nurses tended to get a little foul-mouthed, but that didn't mean she approved. Just because a nurse, especially a surgical nurse, lived daily with death was no reason for her to become callous. With some girls it was a defensive mechanism. Suddenly confronted by the interior of a human body, glistening in all its secret fluids, watching patients suffer and die, they tried to hide their human sympathy. If allowed to run its full course, it would drive them mad.

Liz hoped she'd never become callous. She cared. She knew there were times when she cared too much, but she had promised herself early on that she would always care.

The Ivy League doctor in uniform took over. "There will be danger," he said. "I won't appeal to you by saying that our fighting men face those dangers every day. I won't even appeal to you to ask yourselves if you can do less, considering how many men will give their lives in the defense of freedom. I will remind you that not every navy nurse will serve overseas. Our stateside hospitals are already crowded. We are, for example, still treating some of the more serious Pearl Harbor cases, and rehabilitation and therapy are but two of the fields open to you. Our wounded boys are being sent home from all over the world. For the duration, military medicine will be a microcosm of the entire medical profession. You will have the opportunity to serve and to study grouped symptoms as never before. The research possibilities alone will be fantastic. Some of the work done on burn victims, for example, is quite exciting. Anyone who serves under these accelerated conditions will come out of it a highly ex-

perienced and valuable person, in a position to make a real contribution to the profession."

He paused, as if trying to evaluate the effect of his talk. A pack of green-packaged Luckies passed along the front row. Lucky Strike green had not yet gone to war, at least not on that pack. Liz took one and passed it on.

"As naval officers," the doctor said, "you will have the same opportunity for promotion as men in the service. The navy has been setting up training schools so that you can add to your professional knowledge. As Commander Waters told you, there will be opportunities to study tropical diseases. In the world that will come after the war, there will be vast opportunities through the tropical areas of the Pacific and Far East, much of which will then be under U.S. control."

"Doctor," someone asked, "aren't you being a bit premature? We've got to win the war first, haven't we?"

The doctor looked at the nurse for a moment. "Is there any doubt in your mind that we will win the war?"

"No, no," the girl said, sinking down in her seat.

"I'm being realistic," the doctor said. He smiled. "I know I shouldn't talk politics, but here's how I see it. Someday we might even thank the Japs for bringing about an end to British influence in the Far East."

Liz, who'd been musing, looked up with a frown.

"The Japs have kicked the British out of Hong Kong and Singapore and most of southeast Asia. When this war is over there'll be a great vacuum in the Far East, into which the U.S. will move, with the help of a resurgent China. A nurse trained in tropical disease treatment will be able to write her own ticket, will be able to work on the islands, in China, in the Philippines, in Indonesia and southeast Asia. These areas are a natural sphere for U.S. influence. If we'd recognized that earlier we wouldn't be at war now."

"Doctor," Liz asked, "how long do you expect the war to last?"

"Well, that's it," he said with a smile, flicking cigarette ashes into a coffee cup. "We're getting cranked up now. Soon we'll be turning out ships and planes in quantities that will smother the Japs. I'm in no position to know, so I'm not giving away any military secrets, but I'd bet my operating hand that we'll be on the offensive before the end of the summer. After that it will be fast, so those of

you who want to take advantage of this opportunity will have to move fast, because the first thing you know we'll be bombing Tokyo into glowing embers and the Japs will know they've tweaked the tail of a sleeping tiger."

Lieutenant Commander Waters, whose stern face showed obvious disapproval of the political lecture, moved forward. "The instant advantage for those who enlist immediately is that commissions are now being granted on a direct basis, without the need for extended basic military training. Nurses who enlist now will be put to work after a brief indoctrination course. That translates into being taught how to salute stray admirals."

"There is one thing I'd like to add," the doctor said. "I guess I got carried away with my own personal view of post-war geopolitics. I left out the most important thing of all, and that's the urgent need for good medical care for our boys, the ones who are doing and will do the fighting. We're going to take medical facilities just as near to the fighting fronts as possible when we start knocking the Nips back toward Tokyo. When our boys hit the beaches and are wounded there'll be doctors and nurses with the best care facilities right behind them, sometimes on the beaches *with* them. When a man takes a piece of shrapnel in his stomach he needs care then, not later. We're going to give it to him.

"Those of you who become a part of this will be able to tell your grandchildren that you were there with your brothers and fathers and husbands. You'll be able to look the world proudly in the eye and say, 'I fought in World War Two.'"

Liz had to rush directly to Operating Suite B after the meeting. There she scrubbed and observed a gallbladder excision. She was very pleased when her supervisor let her assist the surgeon on the case. Then there was a seminar designed to refresh memory on sterile technique as a part of preparing the student nurses for the state board examination. The day was hectic, as usual, and when she finished it she was tired, as usual.

She had her evening meal in the hospital cafeteria and was enjoying a rare indulgence, a piece of lemon pie, when she saw Mark making his way toward her.

"Looking for anyone in particular?" she asked as he joined her.

"A pretty student nurse," he said.

"Well, accept what you see or go looking elsewhere." she said.

"Are you going to finish that coffee?" he asked.

She pushed her cup toward him. He turned the side with the lipstick mark away from him and sipped. "Are you free tonight?"

"I'm free," she said, "but I'm looking forward to a hot bath and an early bedtime."

"Yeah, well. I just thought—"

There was something in his manner that alerted her. "Something wrong, Mark?"

"Wrong? Oh, no. Just had a yen for some friendly company."

"If you can be patient while I take a hot bath I'll make it a ten o'clock bedtime."

"Fair enough," he said.

He walked with her and waited in the lobby of the nurses' quarters. A bit refreshed, she came downstairs dressed in a two-piece suit. There was a small run in her hose, but fortunately it didn't extend down below her skirt, at least not yet. Her hair was just long enough to touch her padded shoulders.

"Walk?" Mark asked.

"Have a heart, guy," she said.

"Well, we'll splurge." They lucked into a taxi in front of the hospital. Mark gave the address of a small Italian restaurant. He was moodily silent during the drive. Liz took the opportunity to lean back against the seat and relax. For the first time since hearing the recruiting pitch she had time to think about it.

She'd lived and worked in the same hospital for three years, taking all shifts, mornings, three-to-eleven, and the endless eleven-to-seven night shift. Once she had tried to estimate how many bedpans she'd emptied during the first two years. It had been, overall, an interesting three years, but the idea of staying in the same hospital didn't appeal to her. Graduation was near. If she stayed on at the hospital as a part of the staff, doing the same things she'd done for three years, she might have trouble remembering that she was no longer a student nurse.

The little restaurant was one of Mark's favorite places. He was well known and he was fussed over, the owner's wife seating them, telling Mark she'd read his editorial about the need for home-front sacrifice.

"We maka de sacrifice alla time," she said. "We get them Japs, them Nazis, them Wops, eh?"

"We'll get 'em, Mama." Mark grinned. "Right now, though, how about you get us the best bottle of wine in the house?"

Liz looked at him questioningly.

"Just dago red, beeeg boy," Mama said. "Ees a war on, boddy."

"Dago red," Mark said in resignation.

"Cruddy of you to invite me to dinner after I've already eaten," Liz said.

"Funny," he said, ignoring her. "Mama grew up in Italy, and she's more American than either of us."

"So were some of the Japanese-Americans we rounded up and put into concentration camps," Liz said.

"Detention camps," he said.

Over wine and antipasto Mark showed a disinclination to talk. Liz, in spite of good resolutions, took on more calories in the delicious bread and cheese. While waiting for the pasta course she leaned over, let him light a cigarette for her. She was smoking more lately, although there was no real reason for it. But she wasn't hooked. She could take them or leave them.

"All right, Mark," she said. "What's eating you?"

He looked at her over the rim of his glass, emptied it, put it down, let his eyes fall as he spoke. "We've known each other a long time, Liz."

"Is this going to be a serious talk?" she asked with a smile. "If so, I need another glass of wine." He supplied it.

"Fairly serious."

"I know we've known each other a long time," she said. "And let me guess what the serious subject is. Hmmm." She looked at him brightly. "You've found yourself a girl."

"Ah, the intuition of a woman," he said with a wide grin.

"I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yes and no."

"Explain."

"Well, it's fairly simple. I think I've found a girl, as you say, but I'm not sure she's found me."

"Ah," Liz said, "so that's the way it is. Serves you right. Now you know how I felt when you wouldn't let me date Paul Jenner."

"Vindictive wench," he said. At times he had a little-boy look, especially when he was hurt.

"Let me tell you," she said, "any girl in her right mind would not say no to you, Mark Fillmore." She held up her hand as he started to speak. "You're a very upstanding citizen with a good, solid job. You're not too ugly. In fact, you have a sort of Clark Gable look about you, all that black hair. Maybe you should grow a moustache."

He pulled a comb from his pocket and held it to his upper lip, making a Nazi salute.

"Not like that one," she said. "Now listen. You're kind and considerate except when you're on a walking binge and forget that a poor girl is hobbling along on high heels. You have flat feet, so you're not going to be drafted. What more could a girl ask for?"

"Is it that simple?" he asked.

"Nothing to it," she said. "You just tell any girl you're in love with her and she won't be able to resist."

"That's the problem," he said. "I think best with my fingers on the keyboard of a typewriter. If I could propose on paper—"

"Well, why not? That might be very romantic. You could really let yourself go, get quite flowery."

He looked at her seriously. "Do you really think it might work?"

"I think so," she said with a fond smile.

"I was thinking of it, strangely enough." He pulled an envelope from his inside jacket pocket. "This is just a rough draft. See what you think."

"Do I know this lucky girl?" Liz asked, taking the unsealed envelope.

"Yes."

There was a folded sheet of paper inside. There were two lines of type.

I find that I am, after all, in love with you. Will you marry me?

"You can do better than that," she said. "That's not flowery at all."

"Well, I was trying for the direct approach. More wine?"

"Ummm," she said, holding out her glass. "Who is she?"

"Since you don't like the direct approach," he said, "see what you think of this."

She rolled her eyes and smiled as he dug out another envelope.

I know, my dear, that this is sudden, at least for you. It's not at all sudden for me, it's just taken me some time to get up my nerve. I've known for a long, long time that I want to look into your eyes first thing every morning for all the mornings we have left. You may ask why I have not spoken sooner, and I confess that sheer fear held me back, fear that you might say no, for you are beautiful, vibrant, desirable, and so young that you will be given many chances to pick and choose men who are more handsome, richer, wittier.

My heart, however, tells me that you are my first and only choice.

I can offer you only my love, and a promise of total and complete devotion forever. I can only hope that will be enough, and that you will cast your lot with mine, to cling to me as I long to cling to you. Say that you will become my very much adored wife.

"Wow," she said, "she must be some girl." She'd never known Mark to be so emotional.

"She is," he said.

"It's a lovely letter," she told him.

"Think that might do it, huh?" he asked with his wry grin.

"Who is she?" Liz asked. "You just have to tell me."

He grinned and, with some hesitation, still another envelope came out from the inside pocket. She reached for it, but he held it back.

"I remember one summer afternoon when you were, oh, about eight," he said. "You and Vivian were in the backyard playing dolls. I was mowing the lawn and had stopped to rest and you didn't know I was there. You were explaining family life to Vivian and then you told her that was the way your life was going to be when you grew up and married Mark Fillmore."

"And boy, was I ever jealous when you started dating," she said. "You broke my heart, showing off those floozy older girls, dressing up in your tux to take someone other than me to the school proms."

"You were too young. They wouldn't have allowed you in."

"Well," she said, reaching for his hand. "I forgive you. Now tell me who is the lucky girl."

He was silent. He poured wine and lifted his glass. They clinked glasses. "To the girl next door," he said.

"And the boy next door," she answered. "Now are you going to 'fess up?"

"I am," he said. He handed her the envelope. The paper inside was a rough piece of loosely woven, thick teletype material. The note was in the form of a typed memo.

From: Mark Fillmore

To: Dora Elizabeth Wilder

Subject: Matrimony

Liz, it's you, dummy.

It was a long, long time before she could look up.

"Now you're not going to tell me that you didn't know all along," he said.

"Oh, Mark." She was searching desperately for words.

"You're beginning to worry me," he said.

"Mark, really, I had no idea."

"You're not going to make a liar out of yourself, are you?" he asked. "You said, just minutes ago, that any girl would be foolish to say no. And you're not foolish."

"Oh, Mark," she said. "Goddamnit," she said, flushing immediately.

"That's what they're teaching nice girls in nursing school?"

She took his hand in both of hers. "Mark, you're the last person in this whole wide world I'd want to hurt."

He removed one hand and brushed a tear from her cheek with a finger. "Happiness?" he asked, but there was defeat in his voice. "Overwhelmed that old Mark has loved you for years without even knowing it until, oh, say the last couple? Or is it something else? Look, if I'm that far off base— We've been close, but maybe I'm assuming too much. Maybe I'm just the fellow you come to with your problems. I thought I knew all about you, Liz, but I guess I don't. Maybe all this time you've been in love with someone else."

"No, no," she said quickly. "It's not that at all. Mark, I love you. I really do, but—"

He seemed relieved. "Ah, that's more like it. That I'm ready for. It's natural for you to think of me as the big brother you never had. I'll admit that I've enjoyed the role in the past. It made me feel adult to be able to give advice, to see to it that you didn't get mixed up in anything bad."

She smiled. "I still haven't forgiven you for not letting me date Roger. I was madly in love with him."

"His trick was to mix vodka in a girl's Coke," Mark said. "I wasn't about to let my next-door little sister—"

"Ah," she said, holding up a finger. "That's it, Mark. You're the dearest man I've ever known, and I'll always be fond of you. It's just that I've never thought of you in, ah, any other terms."

"You did when you were eight," he said.

"And at ten and twelve," she admitted.

Mark fished in his inside pocket. "Here," he said, extending still another envelope.

"Oh, no," she said, rolling her eyes toward the ceiling.

So, as I anticipated, you have told me that you love me as a brother. That's fine. I can accept that as a good place to begin. But hear this: I am not your brother. I am a man who loves you as a woman. Think that one over. I will not press you. I will not insist that you make an immediate decision. But I do warn you that, henceforth, you will not be treated as a sister. You will, be wooed, courted, kissed—and not in a brotherly fashion—at each opportunity, until you see the light. Fair enough?

She laughed, delighted. Just old Mark having his fun. "You've never kissed me," she said accusingly.

"We'll make up for it."

"I'll feel incestuous."

"The family that plays together stays together."

"Evil, evil," she said.

"I could be right. Ever think of that?" he was holding her hand. "I didn't realize that I loved you until lately. Maybe you've loved me too all this time."

"You may be right," she said.

"We'll have plenty of time to make sure we're both

right," he said. "And I'll have one other thing on my side, the old saying that absence makes the heart grow fonder."

She jerked a look at him. No, no, he had flat feet. He'd already tried to enlist. "Mark?" she asked.

He went into his pocket once again. She groaned. "That has to be the largest pocket in the world."

"And it's now empty," he said, handing her an official brown envelope. The letter inside was from the War Department. Mark Fillmore had been accredited as a war correspondent.

"Oh, Mark," she said sadly.

"You have to give me credit. I could have used the old line that I'm going off to war and might not come back, but you and I both know that we don't lose many war correspondents. It would be bad publicity."

"When do you go?"

He cleared his throat. "Tomorrow, as a matter of fact."

"Why the hell haven't you told me before?" She was using her ration of profanity for weeks to come. But she was darned mad at him, knowing all along and not telling her. "You didn't even have to do it. You're doing a vital job right here. You heard just now what Mama thinks about your editorials. You've been writing about the lack of preparedness for years and you're now recognized as a man who should have been listened to. People will listen to what you have to say now, and you can serve the war effort better from your desk than from somewhere off—"

"Liz, Liz," he said, putting his hand over her mouth. "Before this is over there'll be millions of American men scattered all over the globe. Millions of them. And they'll be put through a meat grinder the likes of which this world has never seen, with our military leaders still thinking that Pickett's Charge was brave and glorious." He shrugged. "I know, you've heard all this before."

"A navy doctor told us today that we'd better hurry and enlist or we'll miss all of it," she said.

"And that kind of thinking is going to kill a lot of young men," he said.

"Sometimes you can be frightening, Mark Fillmore," she said with a shudder.

"Why were you talking with a navy doctor?" he asked.

"The navy needs nurses."

"Considering it?"

"Oh, yes, I'm thinking about it."

"Liz, before you decide, listen to old Mark spout off again, okay?"

"Shoot, Luke."

"We're fighting this war for all the wrong reasons. Oh, sure, we were ruthlessly and shamefully attacked by the sea and air forces of the Empire of Japan, to quote old Gaudy Guts—"

"He *is* the President of the United States," Liz protested. "And, furthermore, you don't feel half as cynical as you try to sound."

"Sure, sure," he said. "But we're a war looking for a cause, Liz. Now in the Great War we had a cause. We were making the world safe for democracy. This one is being fought for the basest of motives, for land, for power, for control of people."

Liz started to protest and he held up his hand. "That's not our *sole* motivation, of course. We didn't start the war. Germany wanted to control all of Europe. Japan wanted to extend the Jap Empire all over the Pacific. We knew that. Instead of heading them off years ago, like when they sank the *Panay* in China, or when Hitler went into the Rhineland, we sat on our butts and let them get into a position from which they could start a war of territorial conquest. So in spite of all our high-sounding moral propaganda, we're fighting simply to keep Germany and Japan from taking over more than half the world. Our politicians and diplomats failed at their job and it'll be G.I. Joe who pays the price. I can't be at his side in the front lines, and I'm not even sure I'm brave enough to want to be. But I can help. I can see and report the war from the eyes of the dogface, or the leatherneck, the men with the rifles. They're going to need a spokesman."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"West." He chuckled. "With a lot of other men. Funny to think that you head west to get to the East. We'll be moving men west for a long time, and only then will we finally understand the expression 'Far East.'"

"The doctor says he expects an offensive before the end of summer," Liz said. "Can your going have anything to do with that?"

"I really don't know. The brass haven't taken me into their confidence."

"Mark, you'll be very, very careful," she ordered.

"I'll write." He grinned. "Mushy letters."

"And you won't try to be a hero. Mark, do you hear me?"

"I have a lot to live for," he said. "I'm going to convince you that this worthless carcass is worthy of your love."

They walked most of the way back. She didn't object. He held her hand. He'd held her hand before, but there was a new quality in his touch now. It was more tentative, even a bit shy. And in the shadows of the trees on the hospital grounds he turned her to face him, and, without words, took her in his arms. It was true, she'd never kissed him. One doesn't smooch with a big brother, and she had difficulty taking it seriously. She was almost ready to giggle when she felt him trembling, his arms, his legs. And for a moment she was a bit awed. Old Liz doing this to old Mark? She accepted his kiss, returned it, then pulled gently away.

"Will I see you before you leave?"

"No. I'm off before sunup."

"Damn you, Mark Fillmore," she said. Then: "Oh, darn, see what you make me do?"

He was kissing her again and she, missing him already, feeling guilty because she could not return his newly declared love, began to wet both their cheeks with her tears.

"You worry me," she whispered, as he let his lips touch her cheek. "You *will* try to be a hero, I just know it."

"Good," he said. "Good that you're worried about me. And, no, I won't try to be a hero. And if you're going to weep I'm leaving."

"Damn you."

"You've said that."

"Mark, I don't want you to go."

"Good, good." He chuckled. Kissing her lightly, he turned and walked away without looking back.

FIVE

EARLIER that day, about a block from her home, Vivia had pressed Terry's hand and walked away, looking back once to see him smile and wave. Her entire being seemed to have taken on a new and vital life. She seemed to be

more aware of her body, of the clench and unclench of muscles, the smooth fling of her legs. She could hear the *swish-swish* of her skirt as she walked. She tingled. She had an insane urge to run back to him, throw herself into his arms. She found herself laughing for no reason. A crazy girl, walking along the sidewalk with her head high, seeing green tree branches against a blue and white-dotted sky as if for the first time, a simple vision of utter beauty. To stop the laughing, she put her hands on her arms and hugged, giggled, drew her shoulders back, and marched as if she owned the earth and had an option on the stars.

Her mother was knitting on the front porch. "More bundles for Britain?" Vivia asked.

"You're a little late, dear," her mother said.

"It's only quarter of five."

"Your father told you to come directly home."

"I walked slow."

"Vivian, he's only thinking of your best interests," Elizabeth said, with a sigh.

"Look, I'll be in my room, okay?"

"I'll have to tell your father you were late."

"As Clark Gable said to Vivian Leigh," Vivia said, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

"Vivian Ruth," her mother gasped. "I will not have you talking that way."

Vivia was gone, running up the stairs. In her room, leaning back against the door, a little smile insisted, teased her lips. She wondered if her mother had noticed a difference in her. Wow and wow and wow.

And there was the evening. That was the problem, the evening. She was grounded. She looked out the window. It wouldn't be the first time she'd climbed out onto the roof of the back porch, to the tree, and swung to the ground.

She'd really let herself go during the afternoon, as she'd never let herself go before, and it was only Terry's honor, his love for her, that had saved her. Gee, it was good to be able to let him kiss her as long as he wanted, longer than she could ever let one of the boys in her life kiss her. Good to be able to know that the entire burden was not on her. Unfair, it was, for girls had as many feelings, desires, as boys, and it was *always* the girl who had to say "Hey, no, buster."

And underneath it all was a little feeling of sheer panic,

for she was going to climb out that window. She was going to meet Terry at the park at nine thirty and what if she felt, in the dark, the way she'd felt in the warm sunlight on the deserted beach? Halt. Stop.

"No," she said, telling herself that practice made perfect. "No, no, no." Practice saying it while your whole body says *yes, oh, yes*.

She took a long bath, then selected her nicest pair of panties. Darned war. The ones you bought now had that synthetic rubber or something and this was her last decent pair with real elastic. And she thought of poor Pam St. David, leaping and jiving at cheerleader practice when the synthetic broke and down they came, blooming down around her knees. Vivia's best slip was rayon in that color that Liz sometimes laughingly called titty pink. She had developed a bit in the past year and her best bras were too small and there was only the wartime cotton, which felt harsh.

She took a quick look into the hall to find the coast was clear, dashed into Liz's room, and selected a dress. It was mostly crepe, black with lace at the neckline, which was cut pretty low. And there was Liz's black pillbox hat. She carried them to her room and put them on. Not bad. She couldn't put on a pair of the lovely new stockings Terry had given her. Not yet. And she had to change back into her skirt and sweater for dinner.

Her father didn't start until the meal was half over. She'd been totally silent, merely pecking at her food. The attack came as a total surprise.

"Vivian Ruth," he said, his calm tone belying his mood. "I was thinking of you this afternoon."

"Yes, Dad?" she asked.

"I ran into Bradley Thomas and he happened to mention that he was interested in taking on some summer office help. I thought of you immediately."

"Well," she said. The last thing she wanted was to spend the summer in a musty law office while all the other kids were at the beach.

"In fact," John Wilder said, "I called the school."

Oh, God, she thought, her stomach flipping. "Well, I was, uh, out." Why hadn't she a suitable story? "I was out to get some pictures for the school annual," she said, thinking quickly, too quickly.

"Which went to press a couple of months ago and a

copy of which is now lying upstairs on your dresser," John said. "Do you remember the last time I laid a hand on you, Vivian Ruth?"

You wouldn't dare, she thought wildly. "Yes, sir."

"Before you try to come up with another lie," he said, "I want you to think about this, Vivian Ruth. Think of the position your mother and I are in. You've always been a lively girl, but I never, until today, thought that we had reason to mistrust you seriously. Now I'm not so sure. And now you may tell me why you cut school this afternoon."

The truth? Well, he had asked for it. Yes. The truth, damnit. "I was out with the man I'm going to marry," she said, her voice gaining strength toward the end. There was a dead silence.

"I see," said her father. "And do we know this man you're going to marry?"

"No."

"Well, that's pleasant news," her father said with rich sarcasm. "I suppose now you're going to tell me you met him in that booze joint you've been frequenting."

"As a matter of fact, I met him on a cable car. Just last night."

"Oh, my poor child," Elizabeth said, with a gush of tears.

"Shut up, Elizabeth," John said firmly. "Were you going to marry this man you picked up in the street without telling us?"

"No," she said, wanting to reach out to her mother, who was weeping quietly.

"And when did you decide you would marry him?"

"Just now, I think," she said. She took a deep breath and plunged on. "Just now, when you insisted on treating me as if I were a child, thinking that I was doing horrible things just because I left school early. Well, it's not like that. It's not like that at all. He's sweet and wonderful and I do love him and I'm going to tell him tonight that, yes, I will marry him."

"You seem to have forgotten that you're grounded," John said. His deadly calm frightened her more than his anger. "Is this man you picked up in the street coming to my house?"

"No."

"Then I don't think you're going to tell him anything, unless it's by telephone."

Open defiance, although so tempting, was too dangerous. She thought that, as an eighteen-year-old, she had the right to make her own decisions. But she wasn't sure. He might even try to lock her up. Now the most important thing was to get away from both of them, into the privacy of her room, where she could think. She knew only that she would see Terry at nine thirty, regardless of what she had to do.

"You will, immediately after finishing your dinner, go to your room and close the door. And you will stay there until I say you may come out," John said. "As it happens, I know that you left school just after eleven this morning with a naval officer perhaps twice your age—"

"He's twenty-five," Vivia said.

"—in an automobile in which you then disappeared from the eyes of the decent world—"

"Decent?" Vivia asked, rising. "Are you saying I'm not decent? You can't say that, Dad, you can't. Terry's a gentleman, and he loves me. We've done nothing wrong. I swear it."

"Well, now," he said. "In view of your sudden propensity for lying, how are we to be sure of that?"

It hurt. She wouldn't admit it, covering the pain with anger, but it hurt. She ran from the room, holding her tears until she was inside her room.

It was six o'clock, Pacific War Time, and the next two hours were the longest in Vivia's life. At eight, having decided that they were going to leave her alone—she could hear raised voices from below now and then—she dressed in Liz's sophisticated gown.

Darned War Time. It was still light at nine, but she would wait no longer. Shoes in hand, stockings stuffed into her pocketbook lest she snag them climbing down, she crept barefooted through the window, onto the roof, down the tree, and through the hedge separating the Wilders' yard from the Fillmores'. Mrs. Fillmore would be in the living room listening to the radio. She sat down on the Fillmores' back steps and carefully pulled on her hose. Her spike heels punched holes in the lawn, then clicked on the sidewalk. She was running the last half block, for she could see him waiting for her. He leaned

against the dark Hudson and, as she neared, he flipped away his cigarette in a shower of sparks.

"Hey, nice," he said. He pulled her to him and kissed her.

She was thinking of her parents, back there in the living room, arguing over her. She had to fight an urge to run back to the room where she'd spent most of her life in loved security. She felt as if she were falling, as if she'd taken the last step over a high bluff. There was nothing below but an ocean of cold, dark water.

"You look swell," he said.

"You said to dress."

"Well, we're off."

He still refused to tell her where they were going. He drove slowly, having pulled her next to him, his arm around her shoulders. She was still more than a little frightened, openly defying her father for the first time. But she was eighteen, an adult. She looked at Terry and felt better. He had a strong profile. His chin was absolutely elegant, his nose strong and straight, his brows nicely bushy.

He parked in front of a hotel. Men in uniform were going in and out, walking along the sidewalks. She swallowed and started to protest. But she was soon thankful she hadn't made a fool of herself, for they emerged from an elevator into a huge room that looked out on the darkened city.

People were looking at her. She didn't realize it at first, but they were. Blond, very blond, figure full and yet sleek, long legs pushing the black gown out confidently, skirt swishing. Terry beside her, so tall, so handsome, so clean looking in his whites. It was almost like being on stage.

"Wow, Terry," she whispered, "can you afford this?"

He winked at her. "Can't spend money where I'm going."

Steak. She'd had only a few bites at dinner, during the great battle. She was hungry now, white teeth biting hungrily into the delicious food. And Terry was so attentive. He kept her wine glass full and then—oh, Lord. Could it be true? The piano on the stage was replaced by a huge, wild band: Tommy Dorsey himself! Heaven. She was just tall enough to rest her head on Terry's shoulder. The dreamy, lovely strains of "Stardust." "Marie." Actu-

ally, he wasn't a bad jitter-bug. "T.D.'s Boogie Woogie." Heaven as they sent the older folk off the floor and there she was, skirt flaring, Terry doing a decent job of just keeping time while she swirled around him.

"Oh, oh, oh," she said, as they danced to the Pied Pipers crooning a nice love song.

"Like?" he asked.

"Just heaven. I know it's expensive and we can't do it all the time, but can we do this just every now and then?"

"Bet your boots," he said.

"I do love you, Terry." So easy to say once she'd made up her mind.

He grinned, nipped a little kiss on the side of her neck. "You see? It works. Wine 'em, dine 'em, give 'em sweet music, and they fall all over you."

"Evil, evil." She laughed.

"Never with you," he whispered. His lips on her neck caused a delicious shiver.

Back at the table she seemed to float high on the music, the food, the wine, the view, Terry. Full moon outside, the bay lit by it, there in the distance.

"I wish we were married now," he whispered.

She envisioned her father, his face and voice deadly calm, mercilessly picking her apart. "So do I."

"We can get married tomorrow," he said.

"No, there's a waiting period."

"Not for men going overseas," he said, taking her hand under the table.

"Are you sure?"

"We wouldn't go off and fight their war if they did things like that to us," he said.

She wanted to believe him. She did believe him, although she was sure he was wrong.

"Vivia, if I can't kiss you soon I'm going to explode," he said.

She felt wonderful. She felt bright and witty. "But anticipation makes even good things better."

"Let's get out of here," he said, not giving her a chance to say no. The waiter came. In the elevator, he pulled her to him and kissed her.

"Not here," she said.

"We're alone, aren't we?"

The elevator stopped and an elderly, well-dressed couple stepped in. She giggled. "See?" she whispered.

"Just you wait," he whispered back. "You're going to get it."

"Shush," she hissed, but she squeezed his hand.

The elevator stopped and he led her out. "This isn't the lobby," she said. They were in a carpeted hall, nothing but closed doors.

"Listen, it took a lot of talking to get a room here."

"Terry—"

"Hey, take it easy. I'm just stopping in for some cigarettes. No sweat, hey?"

He loved her. He was trustworthy. He would take care of her.

The room was typical hotel, small, crowded by bed, dresser, one chair. The bathroom door was open and she could see white tile and the corner of a wash basin. He opened a drawer and took out a pack of Chesterfields. She took one, although she didn't really like smoking. It made her ill.

"And while we're here," he said, pulling her into his arms. She tried to push him away.

"Vivia, you're fighting me." He said it as if she were doing something wrong.

She was fighting. It was sheer instinct. She wanted to kiss him as badly as he wanted to kiss her, she was sure, but in a hotel room? Nice girls didn't— Oh, darn. This was *Terry*. He loved her. They would be married. She melted into his arms and it was a long, long time before she came up for air. "As you said this afternoon, I think it's time we got the hell out of here."

"It's all right," he said. "Trust me."

"It isn't you I don't trust," she said.

"Oh, Vivia, Vivia," he whispered, the name smothered as he pressed his lips, hard, to hers. It built and built and she went past panic into a numbed place of utter helplessness. But she felt, all the while, that if she really said no, he would stop. To prove it, he pushed her away with a sigh. She sat down weakly on the edge of the bed. There was a pitcher of ice in the bathroom, a bottle of Scotch on the dresser.

"One drink," he said. "Then one more kiss and we'll remove both of our bods from temptation."

She didn't like the taste of Scotch, but as long as she was drinking it, sitting now in the chair, he didn't try to kiss her, so she had two. He talked softly and persua-

sively of their bliss, which would come after the war, when they were married. He asked her where she'd like to spend the few days before he had to go overseas. "Carmel?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. She had a funny little buzz in her ears and the tip of her nose seemed to have gone numb.

"Know what I'd like to do?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Spend the entire time right here. Just go upstairs to eat and dance, come right back here."

"Evil, evil," she said.

"Never with you."

"S'time we got t' hell out of here," she said, rising. It was an evil thought, spending three days and nights in a hotel room. It did scary things to her to think of it.

He caught her on the way to the door. She tried to hold him away, but then she was pressed against him, doing the teenage contortion. But his hands came down, down, cupped where male hands had never been, not for anything more than a sassy slap. He lifted her, pressed her to him, hard, terribly, excitingly hard, and it was so glorious. "Terry, please. Oh, Terry, please."

Too weak, too far into it, oh, God. Her arms going up to feel him, around his neck, her loins with a mind of their own, squirming against him.

"No, no, please, no, no."

"Trust me. Just trust me."

"Oh, no, no."

The bed under her, legs hanging off the edge. Terry atop her. No one had ever had his body between her legs.

"No, Terry."

"Trust me, little doll."

The dress slid down, one strap off the shoulder.

"No, Terry, please."

"It's all right. We did this this afternoon, remember?"

Breasts aflame with his kisses, he lying atop, making that movement, her loins answering.

"We'll be married."

Why was she so helpless? Dizzy. Weak and yet so strong as she answered his movements. His hand! *Down there.*

"Oh, no, please no."

"I promise I'll stop when you say to stop."

"Stop, please stop."

"Not yet."

Her mouth covered with his. His knowing hand. And no more talk. A wetness, a smoothness, and they were magically gone, garter belt, panties, hose.

He sat up. She jerked her skirt down, but could not move.

"Okay," he said, as if with great effort. "That's it. We can wait. After all, it's only until tomorrow, until we're married."

She tried to sit up, and he put his hand on her chest gently. "Just one more thing."

"What?"

"Do you love me?"

"Oh, God, yes."

"Then one more thing." He put his hands on her skirt. "Don't argue. I'm not going to do anything rash. I just must look at you."

A flush of desire, of shame, when she realized *where* he wanted to look. She seized his hands.

"Just look, understand? Just look. I won't hurt you, my darling. I won't do anything but look."

"Oh, no, please." But she was weak, her will gone, her body aflame with him. She felt her skirt being lifted, felt the coolness of the air on her bare limbs.

"Beautiful," he whispered hoarsely. "So beautiful."

And she could almost feel the heat of his eyes. Yes, she could trust him. He was not going to do anything but look.

"My God," he breathed, and he moved so quickly that she was lost, his head going down, down, his hands on her inner thighs, spreading, and like a bolt of lightning his mouth contacted and she cried out in surprise.

"No, no," she begged, reaching up for him at the same time. Eyes suddenly wide, startled, a stab of pain.

My God, what am I doing? Not Vivian Ruth. Not spread on a hotel bed.

But yes, yes, yes, as she felt the stab of pain, cried out, tried to wince away but her own loins threw her back, and back, and back.

SIX

SHE awoke to the sound of her mother's voice. She had been awakened in that same way on most mornings for as long as she could remember, but it was simply astounding to her that the voice had not changed, her room had not changed, her bed was still soft-hard, there were pictures of Liz, herself, and a few special friends. She saw all this when she first opened her eyes. It was incredible. The whole world should have looked different.

"Vivian Ruth, your breakfast is getting cold."

She'd slept through the first few calls, and there was Liz's fine crepe black dress on the floor. She leaped up and made a face. Sore? Oh, wow. And the hose. She picked up the dress and put it on a hanger, secreting it under her raincoat. The hose were laddered. She'd done it coming up the tree, no doubt.

And that was a sadness that she could not contain. She sat on the side of the bed, holding the laddered hose in both hands, and the big, fat tears began and flowed in silence. A silence quite unlike her weeping of the night before, the eon before, the end of her life as Vivian Ruth Wilder, nice girl.

"Vivian Ruth?"

She stuffed the hose under the sheet as she heard the door open behind her.

"I've called and called," her mother said. Then, seeing the averted face, the tear-stained cheeks. "Oh, Vivian Ruth, it isn't all that bad now, is it?"

"I'll be down in a minute," she said.

"Well, it's getting cold."

"I don't care."

"Vivian, Vivian," Elizabeth Wilder said, coming around to sit beside her daughter and put an arm around her. Feeling unclean, unworthy, Vivia flinched away.

"You acted quite unwisely," Elizabeth said. "If you think about it. . . ."

She faded out. Vivia was thinking, but not about the confinement. "Hey," Terry had said, "what's the big

deal? We just stole a short march, that's all. Got a head start on married life."

She had lain on her side, sheet clutched to her chin. The huge, racking sobs would not stop.

"Look, kid, I swear I didn't know you were a virgin—"

Quick anger. "What the hell did you think I was, a streetwalker?"

"Vivia, honey, now stop the crying. I love you, that's all. We'll be married. Look, tell you what, we don't want to get you into trouble. You get yourself dressed and I'll take you home."

"I—can't—go—home—ever," she sobbed.

"Hey, that's crazy. You have to go home tonight or your parents will have the cops out looking for you. You don't want to worry them. Look, when are you going to tell them?"

"I don't know," she sobbed.

"All right, we'll talk about that tomorrow," he said, sitting beside her, patting her shoulder. "It's all right. It's all right."

It was just beginning to surface in her, the knowledge that the irrevocable had happened. Did all girls who went bad feel that way? As if something precious had gone? Not really be able to *feel* the difference, but to know? All of her life she'd been told "Nice girls don't." She had. Therefore, she was no longer a nice girl.

How could she ever look her mother and father in the face again? Her sobs grew again. She had proven her father right. She had done exactly what he'd accused her of doing and, oh, God, it hadn't been what she'd expected. No glory, no wild joy, not even any love. She had felt only quick, frantic thrusting of animallike movements and then only the wide-eyed knowledge that it had happened. With her luck she'd get caught the first time too and—

"Oh, Christ," he had muttered as she wailed out her anguish.

What had he said? She tried to remember, her mother's words washing over her now, unheard, the voice soothing.

"When can you get away tomorrow?" he'd asked.

"I don't know."

"We have to get the license," he said. "Now listen, you want to be fresh and bright for that, so get dressed, huh?"

She felt so exposed, so silly, as she dressed, for she did not have the courage to ask him to leave the room, nor

to retreat to the bathroom. The sheets were a mess. There was no doubt about her virginity. She had to go to the john and use toilet tissue to line her panties, for she was still oozing blood.

"That's my girl," he said, kissing her lightly on the cheek. He seemed so cool, so distant. She felt a need for reassurance and threw herself against him, his arms coming around her.

"Oh, Terry," she said. "I'm sorry I was so silly."

"No, no, not at all. It's a big thing, I guess, in a girl's life."

"Terry, I'm glad it was you."

For, in his arms, her feeling for him was there again, and even a little tingle of desire. "Hey," she whispered, "I could stay another half hour."

"Oh, no you don't," he said, laughing. "One of these days I'm going to have to meet your old man and explain all this. Let's not make it worse than it is."

He was so wise, so right.

"I have this final exam in the morning," she said. "But I can slip away from school as soon as it's over, about noon, okay?"

"Come to the hotel," he said. "I'll be here waiting."

"Now stop crying this instant," Elizabeth Wilder said.

"All right, Mom." Head high, girl. It's not visible. And it'll be all right. Even if he's wrong and there is a waiting period for the license, it'll be all right.

Astoundingly, she was famished. She was pleased to see that her mother attempted to make things more pleasant by giving her two eggs.

The morning was nice. She breezed through the test in American history. She'd never had any problem memorizing things, only in remembering them after time had passed. And then it was the end of the last period before noon and she was running out of the school. It was half-past twelve when she reached the hotel. There she had a bad moment, for she was sure, as she walked through the lobby, head high, pleated skirt swinging, saddle shoes making a soft *plop-plop* on the thick carpeting, that everyone was looking at her and wondering what she was doing in a hotel in the middle of the day, making for the elevators.

There was his room. She felt a sudden surge of elation,

of adventure, of love. "Hey, hey," she called out softly, as she knocked in rhythm on the door. "Open up."

A stern-faced army colonel looked down at her.

"Whoops," she said gaily. "Sorry, wrong room." He was looking after her as she ran back to the elevator. Inside, she didn't push the button, just gave him time to close the door and then went back into the hallway. No doubt about it. It was his room. She could never forget that number. Perhaps he was waiting in the lobby and she'd missed him, or in the coffee shop. However, a thorough search of each produced no Terry. Something must have happened to him. Mustering her courage, she went to the desk.

"Lieutenant Terry Allen, in room four eleven," she said confidently, as if she'd been inquiring after men in hotels for ages. "Has he checked out?"

The clerk checked the register. "Seems he has."

"Did he—did he leave any message?" she asked.

The clerk flipped through a sheaf of envelopes. "Your name Vivian?" She nodded. She did not open the envelope until she was outside, on the sidewalk. It was in a scrawled, masculine handwriting on the hotel's stationery.

Vivian

Duty calls, my love. I'll be in touch.

Terry

"Are you all right?" someone was asking. She was leaning against a building. She shook her head. Things began to come into focus again.

"Yes, yes," she said. "I'm fine, thank you."

She didn't even know where he was stationed, had no idea how to get in touch with him. She knew so little about him. His name, his age, the fact that he wore a navy uniform and pilot's wings. "Oh, Terry," she whispered, "you wouldn't, you wouldn't."

As she walked slowly back toward the school, she conducted an argument with herself. "He wouldn't."

"Maybe he would. Men have done it before."

"Not Terry."

"Why not?"

"He wouldn't. He just wouldn't."

"He did."

"No."

"He has."

Oh, God. Blind, stupid idiot to fall for such a corny old line. "Look, baby, we're going to get married, it's all right."

He would. He had. He surely had. And where did that leave her? What if she had gotten caught on the very first time? "Hey, Dad, hey, Mom! Guess what? You're going to have a bastard grandchild."

A sailor whistled and smiled. All around her life went on and she was outside of it, an exile, a girl gone bad, maybe creating life inside her at that minute. She thought of ending it all in the bay and for a tense moment *that* had appeal, and then she knew, firmly and finally, that she would never, never kill herself, no matter how bad things got. Hell, no. She was Vivia Wilder. She had a talent. Vivia Wilder didn't give up.

Entering a little restaurant, she plunked down a quarter, got a cup of coffee, weakened it with as much cream as the cup would hold, dumped in two spoons of sugar, and still didn't really like the stuff, she got back fifteen cents in change.

"Anything else, honey?" the waitress asked.

"No, thank you," Vivia said. The girl was not much older than she. "You're from Texas, aren't you?"

"Naw," the waitress said, "but close. Altus, Oklahoma. That ain't too far from Texas."

"I like to study accents," Vivia said.

"Well, some of yawl out here really talk funny," the girl said. "You from here?"

"I've never even been away from here, except once," Vivia said, envying the girl for having traveled.

"Well, it's nice." She pronounced it *izniize*. "But like they say, there just ain't no place like home."

"How did you come to be here?"

"Well, that Billy Gene . . . you know men. He jest had to be in it, you know? I mean, well, I reckon he 'uz one of the very first to join up after Pearl and I wu'dn't about to let that old boy come out here with all them movie stars and all without little old Ida Louise, know what I mean?"

Vivia laughed. "Navy?"

"Naw. Billy Gene, he thinks he's all man and a yard wide. Marine Raiders, no less."

"Gee, they're pretty tough," Vivia said. The girl had rather nice black hair. Her skin was all freckled, sort of

cute freckles, and there was an underlying redness that spoke of years of exposure to sun and wind. She was sort of skinny, but had a nice set of boobs. Now and then Vivia would catch the two sailors down at the end of the counter looking not at her, but at the waitress.

"Well, I jest hope he's tough as he thinks he is." And for a moment there was a wildness, a sort of desperate emptiness, in her eyes. Then she was smiling again. "That fool says he's going to send me a Jap sword and a Jap flag to make a scarf out of. You 'magine me runnin' 'round the streets in Frisco wearing a Jap flag? Whoo."

Vivia laughed. "You'd be lynched."

"I told the fool that."

"Will you go back home when he goes overseas?" Vivia asked.

"Well, don't tell Tojo, but he's already gone," Ida the waitress said. "He don't know where, and I don't ask, but I had a letter from somewhere in the Pacific, you know? No, I reckon I'll stay. He comes back it'll be to here or close by, and I'd just die if I weren't here to hug that ugly guy when he first puts his number tens on land. I got me this little room, you know. You think that didn't take some doing, I'll tell you, kid."

She knew. Hardly a week went by without one of them knocking on the door. They came from all over the country, following their men to the ports of embarkation, to the training camps. "Excuse me, but would you by any chance happen to have an extra room you could rent? It doesn't have to be big, just a bed. Anything."

"Boy, I was one lucky girl to get this job," Ida said. "You jest try to live on what they give a P.F.C."

"How long have you been married?" Vivia asked, sipping the cooling coffee.

"I'm a old vet at it." Ida laughed. "Today's a six-month anniversary."

"Top of the day," Vivia said. "A ole vet? All of, what, eighteen, nineteen?"

"I ain't that old a vet. I'll be seventeen in a couple of weeks."

The two sailors stood, went to the cash register. Ida went to take their money, looked around with a sigh, then came out from behind the counter, the restaurant temporarily empty except for Vivia. She put her hands in the small of her back. Vivia was shocked to see that she was beginning

to show quite a lot, stomach giving a little melon shape under the white waitress uniform. Ida sat on the stool beside Vivia.

"He's started kicking, little rascal," she said, with a lop-sided grin. "Look. Look there." Vivia giggled as the white material bulge of Ida's stomach made and released a small bump.

"Ever kick a ole tin can around?" Ida asked. "That's the way he does." The little bump rose up and moved a little. "Hey, wanta feel?"

Vivia put a tentative hand on the taut material and obligingly the infant inside kicked lustily. She giggled in delight. Then her eyes softened. "But what will you do?"

Ida shrugged. "Well, we'll make it. I figure no matter how rough it is, ole Billy Gene's gonna be havin' it rougher. I'll work till I can't work any more and then we'll jest have to see. Billy Gene, he's a hard worker. He'll make corporal, maybe, and they say that once the real fighting gets goin' it ain't no trouble a'tall to make sergeant, and that'll give a little more money. But I'll tell you one thing, kid—God, I'm glad it happened. I lie me down and try to sleep and I think of something happenin' to Billy Gene out there and if I didn't have a part of him right in here, just below my heart—"

"Ida, can I come by to see you now and then?" Vivia asked with a surge of warmth. "Would you mind?"

"Me, mind? Heck, no, kid. I ain't got many friends. And I'll not lie when I say it gets sorta lonely. Oh, they's a lot of us, I reckon, but aside from a couple of girls I met on the cable cars . . . well, you know."

"I'll come by," Vivia said. "And we'll talk."

"What about you, honey, you got a fella in the service?"

She shook her head. "No, no. I'm just finishing high school."

"If I didn't have junior, here," Ida said, "I'd go over to the shipyards. They're hirin' girls. Man, I mean big money. Guess when I have him I'll try to get me a better job and maybe find a niiize old lady to watch him and. . . ."

"Well, Miss Vivia," she told herself, walking away from the restaurant. "Well." She passed a joint and the juke-box was up loud and Johnny Mercer was singing "*There's a burlesque theater, where the gang loves to go.*"

She pictured herself doing a strip while a band played a polka and men sat around with cigars glowing, yelling, "Take it off, take it off." Ida Louise was so brave that it made her just want to bawl.

Suddenly she checked her watch. Almost two. Sometimes Rudy Blake rehearsed the band in the afternoon. She hopped a cable car. Sure enough, she heard the band wailing the "Jersey Bounce" as she walked up to the door. Inside there was the smell of stale cigarettes and cigars mixed with that yeasty smell of old beer stains and the remnants of a million drinks. The afternoon light showed the flaws in the nightclub. One should never go into a nightclub during the day, she was thinking, for it was like seeing an aging beauty in fluorescent light, the imperfections emphasized, flaws showing up that were never noticed at night, with the tables crowded and the lights cozy.

She sat on the edge of the bandstand and Rudy winked at her as the band wound down toward a finish. The arrangement was a cross between Benny's and Miller's, and not bad. She found herself tapping a foot and singing the words. "*It started on Journal Square.*"

"What's cookin'?" Rudy asked. The band relaxed, the drummer lit up a butt.

"Don't let me interrupt."

"I won't," Rudy said. He was not an old man at all, maybe not any older than Mark Fillmore. He had a nice, tall build and a little cowlick at the back of his sandy hair that made him look younger. "Cutting school?"

"Rudy, you said once that when I was ready to come see you. . . ." she said, her heart in her mouth. "I'm ready."

He came and squatted down on one heel and grinned at her. "I don't want any papa trouble," he said. "You said you were eighteen."

"I am."

"And not a chance that papa will give his blessings."

"I'm afraid not," she said. "But there won't be any trouble. I promise."

"Yeah, they all do," he said. "Hell, kid, it's a little late, actually. We've got two more weeks in this dump."

"Well, I can travel," Vivia said.

"Yeah, sure, only trouble is I don't know where we'll be traveling. Hell, I don't even know whether or not I'll have a band. Rocky got his greetings last week. The first

trumpet is enlisting in the navy." He ran his fingers through his sandy hair. "Worth riling papa for two weeks' work?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "You mentioned something about the U.S.O. Any word?"

"*Nada*," he said, "zilch, naught." He rose. "Well, get the frame in the game." She followed him onto the stage. He handed her a sheet. "*Tangerine*." "Know it?" She nodded. Helen O'Connell and Eberly and Jimmy Dorsey. "It may not be exactly your key of S-minor, but it's close. See how it perks and we'll adjust if needed."

He bounced it medium, with a nice soaring effect on the saxes. She didn't read one word of music, of course, but it was in the frame and she hit the beat right on the head with a nice, throaty little growl of "*Tan-gerrrrr-ene*." Rudy grinned suddenly and then it was pink and purple heaven as the band carried her, the throb of the bass in her stomach, the tinkle of the piano guiding her, the bass going muted down toward the bridge, running up and around and over her big, throaty voice.

"Jesus God," the drummer moaned when it was over.

"Was it that bad?" she asked.

"It'll do, kid," Rudy said, but his beaming smile sent little shivers of happiness through her. The afternoon was the most memorable she'd ever known. And it made her mad, furious, when it was all over and she was out on the street in lengthening shadows of War Time evening, knowing that the stuff was going to hit the fan for sure when she went home. She'd have to go home. She had only the skirt and sweater she was wearing. There was nothing for it but to go home. Tell them. They could kill her but they couldn't eat her. It was against the law.

She chickened out a block away from home and made her way back toward the city. Liz was working three-to-eleven and she found her on the surgical floor, sitting behind the nurses' desk having a cup of coffee with the desk nurse.

"Hey, are you breaking restriction?" Liz asked, then smiled wryly as Vivia cast her a reproachful glance and looked askance at the desk nurse.

"Got a minute?" Vivia asked.

"I'll get one of the other girls to cover," the desk nurse said, realizing that Vivia seemed disturbed.

"Come on, little sister," Liz said. "We'll be in the coffee lounge," she told the desk nurse.

The lounge, fortunately, was empty. Vivia found herself drinking another cup of coffee that she didn't like and didn't really want.

"All right," Liz said.

"I'm leaving home," Vivia said, not looking up.

"Swell," Liz said, regretting the use of the slang even as she said it, but satisfied with the sarcasm it expressed.

Vivia turned away. "Well, tell me about it," Liz said.

"I thought you, of all people, would understand."

"I can't understand anything unless I know the problems," Liz said, letting sympathy into her voice. "But is this just because you're grounded during graduation time?"

"No," Vivia said.

"Thought about what you'll do, where you'll live?"

"Well," Vivia said, looking at her hopefully, "you'll be graduating soon. I thought we could share an apartment."

"Honey, have you tried finding an apartment in this town lately? I'll probably have to move back home myself. At least for a little while." She reached across the table and took her sister's hand. "What is your main problem?"

Vivia had been thinking about what she would say. "I sang with the big band this afternoon, Liz, all afternoon. And, oh, Liz, it was pure heaven. It's what I want to do, what I *have* to do. I'm good at it. It's all I want out of life, and you know how Dad feels about me singing in what he calls booze joints."

"Do I ever," Liz said. "And will you be paid for this?"

"Oh, sure," she said with a sinking feeling, for she had not even thought to ask Rudy how much she'd get.

"And are you prepared to take the static that goes with it? You'll have Dad to face. And it won't make Mother ecstatic. You'll be working all night. That's no picnic. Your reputation will suffer."

"I don't care about that."

"Those who love you do."

"It's my life, Liz."

"I don't suppose it would do me a bit of good to say 'Vivian Ruth, wait. Go to college, then make your decision.'"

"No."

"So, essentially, you're asking good old Liz to run in-

terference for you, to try to cool the fires on the home front a little."

"Oh, Liz, would you? You know they'll listen to you."

"You haven't been home yet?"

"No."

"Well, I'd better call them." She went to a telephone. Vivian could not quite hear what she said, but she could imagine.

"Steamy, huh?" she asked, as Liz came back, serious-faced.

"They were worried, naturally. You should be more considerate."

"When is anyone ever considerate of me?" she asked, feeling just a bit sorry for herself, then looking at Liz, stricken. "I don't mean you."

"I told them you'd stay with me and that we'd both be there after I get off at eleven."

She borrowed a dollar from Liz and had a sandwich in the cafeteria, spent fifteen cents in the juke box, tapping her foot to Artie's "Summit Ridge Drive," letting the best favorite strains of T.D.'s "Stardust" just soak in deliciously, mentally blending her voice with Frank and the Pied Pipers. She was nodding in the coffee lounge when Liz came in, still in her uniform.

As they approached the house, splurging for a taxi when one happened to be available in front of the hospital, she found herself getting more and more nervous. She knew it was past her parents' bedtime. Maybe she was being just a little inconsiderate.

They were in the living room. Her father had removed his glasses and was, somewhat wearily, massaging the spot on his nose that was pinched by the nosepiece. He did not speak.

"I have personally escorted the prodigal home," Liz said.

"Thank you, darling," her mother said, looking quickly toward John.

Liz sat down on the couch. Vivian took a chair, as far away from her father as possible, and waited. "Well," Liz said, with a sigh. "There's no easy way to do this. Our Vivian Ruth seems to have some ideas and, although I don't want you two to think I'm butting in, I'd like to be here when we talk about them. Not that I'm necessarily on Vivian's side—" Traitor, Vivian thought. "—but"—with

a little laugh—"I remember how it was, getting out of high school, being eighteen."

John Wilder looked closely at her, for she had emphasized the word eighteen.

"Vivian?" Liz said.

She didn't know how to start, and decided on the positive, somewhat belligerent, approach. "Dad, don't start screaming—"

"I was not aware that I was in the habit of screaming," he said coldly, setting the tone.

"I spent the afternoon rehearsing with Rudy Blake's big band at the club," Vivia said, rushing ahead before anyone could speak. She found herself speaking quietly, trying to explain how she felt when she stood in front of a band, became a part of that huge sound, how things happened inside her so that her voice did things she couldn't even have dreamed of. She brought herself to look at her father. Her mother was watching her, lips compressed.

Silent as a stone, John Wilder looked at the ceiling.

"I think our little girl must have some singing talent," Liz said.

"Vivian Ruth," her mother said, "have you thought about going on to college and studying music and doing something worthwhile?"

Vivia made a face. The same old story. *Her* music was nothing but trash. Now if it were Guy Lombardo or even Isham Jones playing in a forest of fig trees or being a little 1932 corny on "On the Alamo" then it wasn't real trash. But the Dorseys, Miller, Benny, Artie, all the real artists were new and, in the eyes of the older generation, just noise. And don't even mention the great black bands, Ellington and Basie and Chick Webb and Erskine Hawkins. Her mother, hearing Ella sing "A Tisket a Tasket" in that cute little-girl voice, thought Ella might look a lot like Vivia, a cute little blond girl. Vivia had never had the heart to tell her mother that Ella was a spade chick and a bit hefty.

"Mom," she said petulantly.

"Let's not get sidetracked," Liz said. Sometimes old Liz could be pretty masterful, Vivia was thinking, and decided, then and there, to be more like her. One thing about Liz, she didn't take no shit off no one. "I've heard Rudy Blake's band. He's darned good. Now, Dad, I know how you feel. But to use your own words, I don't think

girls like Peggy Lee and Helen Forrest are bad girls. I don't think Vivia is a bad girl." She had to smile. She was picking up on it already. Not Vivian, or Vivian Ruth, but Vivia. "I think she should consider the working conditions."

"Listen," Vivia said, "Rudy and I talked about that. He said, 'Look, kid, I'm going to keep an eye on you. It can get pretty rough in some of the places we play.' He said they weren't all Glen Island Casinos or like that, and he said if I got out of line he'd fire my butt—'scuse me, he'd fire me then and there and send me home."

"Are you aware, Liz, that most of the drug cases that come through my court involve musicians?" John asked.

"Dad, I'm not that stupid," Vivia said.

"Vivian Ruth, I'd just die, knowing you were out on the road with a bunch of men on a bus or something," her mother said.

"Mom, they're all nice guys. They're older, you know? They look on me as a little girl."

"You are a young girl," John Wilder said.

"Dad, let me make you a deal, okay?" Vivia said. "Rudy has two more weeks at the club. Let me give it a try. Heck, I might bomb out. Who knows? Just let me work this two weeks and then we'll talk again and I'll know more about whether or not I can make it and whether or not to go on the road with Rudy."

He polished his glasses with his spotless handkerchief. "I thought I had made myself clear," he said. "I said that as long as you lived under my roof I would not allow you to go to a booze joint."

"Hey," Vivia said, "I don't drink it, I just work there."

"I have not changed my mind," John said. "You are of legal age, Vivian Ruth. As a father who loves you, I might want to stop you from doing something foolish. As a judge I would not try to interfere with what the law says are your own personal rights. I can only hope that you will respect my age and experience and listen to me. This will be my final word. I do not and will not approve of your working in a honky-tonk. I will not be proud of you. I will not condone it. Perhaps it is small of me, but I will no longer consider you my daughter if you go against everything in which I believe so strongly. I will not, however, go so far as to throw you out of my house before you are prepared to take care of yourself. I will ask only that you

consider the seriousness of going on your own at such an early age, of giving up any chance of furthering your education. Do I make myself clear?"

Vivia felt the hot tears begin.

"Dad," Liz said, "what a terrible choice you're giving her."

"On the contrary," he said, "the terrible choice is mine. She is asking me to throw away my concept of what is right and what is wrong, and I've lived with it for a number of years." He put on his glasses and looked at Vivia. "So the choice is yours, isn't it?"

"Oh, Dad," she said, her voice choked.

"Now I'm up long past my bedtime," John said, rising. "If this talk is to continue, I'd appreciate it if you'd conduct it quietly."

"Oh, Vivian Ruth, as much as we've done for you," her mother said. "As much as we love you."

Liz rose and came to sit on the arm of Vivia's chair. "Stop the waterworks," she said.

"He is so cruel," Vivia said.

"I will not have you speak of your father that way, Vivian Ruth," her mother said. "Now I suggest that we all sleep, or try to, and let's not have any more of this nonsense."

"That's all they think it is," Vivia wept, when she and Liz were alone. "Nonsense!" And it all seemed to be on her at once, the terrible guilt, the shame, the feeling that the whole world was against her. "Oh, Liz, help me. Tell me what to do."

Liz ran a hand over the fine blond hair. "That's something no one can do," she said. "It would be too easy for me to say either one of two things. I could say, 'They're your father and mother, Vivian Ruth. You'll have other chances, so why make them unhappy?' Or I could say, 'Look, you have an opportunity that comes to few people, and you have talent.' But there is one thing I must say. I know our father and you do too. He meant what he said. He won't kick you out in the street, but you'll find the temperature around here close to absolute zero, and you'll have to remember that Mom's first loyalty is to him. She loves you, of course, but you know how close they are. He will be distant and polite to you. Now and then he might ask you if you've had any success in finding a place to stay. And Mom, although she'll be bleeding in-

side, will not try to change him. So the question you have to ask yourself is how badly do you want to be a band singer?"

"Damnit," Vivian said, "it's all I have left."

"Isn't that a little dramatic, dear?"

For a moment she wanted to tell all, to confide in her sister. She stopped, her mouth open, then closed her lips firmly. "As he said, it's my decision."

If she had ever had any doubts, and there were many, they were dispelled on that very first night with the band. She sat, in a long, white dress, in a straight chair on the bandstand. Rudy began the first set. It was early and the place was not quite full. When it was time, when she heard the intro for "Tangerine," she walked regally to the mike, her stomach doing little flips. The old voice came through. "*Tan-gerrrrrr-ene.*" And she nailed them to the floor. Those who had been dancing began to sway in place, the whole dance floor a little sea of white, upturned faces, and the men at the bar stopped talking and turned to face the bandstand. She gained confidence as she went along, and by the time she finished the three-song break in the first set she felt she could soar across the bay on her own wings.

"Solid, baby," Rudy said, as she swept back to her chair to extended applause. Rudy had to make an announcement. "Hey, hey," he said, "give us a break. The blond chick just joined us tonight and we haven't had time to work out any more arrangements. You'll have more of her later. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Vivian Wilder."

Oh, so nice, so good, standing, bowing, that blazing smile bringing whistles from the sailors and Marines and applause from the couples on the floor.

The door was locked when she got home. Her mother came down, hair under a nightcap, eyes swollen from sleep.

"Oh, Mom," she said, still flying high. "They liked me. It was so great."

"We'll have to have you a key made," her mother said. "Be sure to lock the door." And she was gone. Vivian's room seemed suddenly alien and lonely.

During that first week she lived two distinct and separate lives. When she let herself into her own home at

night she felt like an intruder. She slept late and no longer was breakfast ready when she came downstairs. She ate alone, after putting together toast and grapefruit or, on occasion, trying her hand at frying eggs. She always broke the yolks. Her worthwhile life began in the evenings, when she left the house before dinnertime, avoiding the uncomfortable silence of a meal with her parents. She would pick up something on the way to the club, often at the little restaurant where Ida Louise from Altus, Oklahoma, worked. Ida Louise was "tickled pink" about Vivia's new job, but there was no trace of envy. Ida talked about her Billy Gene and often let Vivia feel the baby kick.

Terry Allen had, in effect, ceased to be a part of her life. She had the capacity to put unpleasant things out of her mind. It had happened. She didn't feel any different, except for a persistent slight bleeding, which forced her to wear sanitary napkins all the time. She wondered if somehow the experience had not upset her natural rhythms. Although it worried her a little, she was sure it would straighten out after her next period.

It thrilled her to look out from the bandstand one night and see Liz at a table with a pair of nurses from the hospital. Rudy had added two more songs for her, and she did her best for Liz. When she was finished she went over to Liz's table, speaking to people on the way, nodding, flashing that blazing smile.

She felt like a small spaniel pup being wriggly and cunning and asking for a pat on the head. "Well?"

"Miss Vivia Wilder." Liz grinned. "I am more than impressed. I am astounded."

"Is that good or bad?" Vivia asked, taking the fourth chair and waving off the cocktail waitress.

"It was very, very good," Liz said, taking her hand. "I am so very proud of you, little sister."

The praise was balm, though it reminded her of the cold and uncomfortable silence at home. But Liz was at least of her generation and knew and if Liz said she was good, well, that was enough for her. She accepted compliments from Liz's nurse friends. When the two went off to the powder room, Liz leaned over and whispered, "Deep freeze still on at home?"

"Don't you know it," Vivia said.

"I'm off tomorrow afternoon," Liz said. "I want to have

some time with you, to talk, just to be with you. Come over about two?"

"Sure," Vivia said. "Well, I guess I'd better get back. Rudy says one of my duties is to just sit up there and be decorative." She kissed Liz on the cheek. "Don't know what I'd do without you, big sister." She turned before she could see the look on Liz's face.

Vivia had the house to herself when she awoke the next day and used the privacy to do her washing and wash her hair. She liked to use the kitchen sink for the hair washing, a practice frowned on by her mother, who said the sink was no place for stray blond hairs. She was doing the second rinse when she heard a little growling snarl in the distance. A plane. It came closer. It was low. She wrapped a towel around her hair quickly and ran to look out a window as the plane came closer.

"Duty calls," he had written.

She had thought she'd been able to put him completely out of her mind, yet it took only the sound of an aircraft engine, low, a deadly, growling sound, to bring him back with a force that left her weak for a moment. Holding her housecoat together at the top with one hand because the top button was missing, she ran for the front door and out into the midday sun. The plane burst into view, low, just clearing the top of the hill and then tilting down. It was a sleek, gleaming Grumman Wildcat, F-4-F, with a big round nose that made it look fat and stubby. It was so low that she could see the iridescent swirl of the prop, so low she could see the pilot's head, the upper part of his face hidden by helmet and goggles.

She had asked him to fly over her house. Oh, how she'd wronged him, thinking he'd merely hit and run, when all the time he had been called back to duty and this was his first chance to let her know he had not forgotten.

The little plane arrowed down and away, toward the bay.

How could she have doubted him?

"Oh, Terry . . . Terry."

He'd call now. After all, he was breaking regulations by buzzing her house. It showed her how much he loved her. If she knew Terry, he'd turn now, climb, come back over and, seeing her in the yard, waggle his wings at her. She felt very important. A brave fighting man and a huge

expensive aircraft putting on a show—all for her. She shaded her eyes against the sun with one hand and waved with the other. She waited for the plane to turn, to climb back toward her, but it leveled, flew low over the bay, and continued into the distance.

She knew, then, that it was only a coincidence, that the flyer had not been Terry. She let her hand fall, forgot to hold the housecoat closed, felt the coolness on her chest and a hurt so severe that she wept openly, standing there in her front yard.

As she walked back into the house, anger began to replace hurt. She picked up the telephone directory and found the page listing U.S. Government facilities, selected a likely looking naval office and placed the call. She gave her name and told a bored-sounding man that she'd lost the address of her cousin, Lieutenant Terry Allen, who was stationed somewhere in the San Francisco area.

"I need to get in touch with him," she said. "Could you tell me, please, how to go about it?"

"Look, lady," the voice said. "There's thousands of navy personnel stationed around here."

"I know," she said, "but this is an emergency."

"Only place with records that might help is the Navy Department in Washington," the voice said. "You could write them." He paused. "Don't hold your breath until they give you the information, though. There's a war on."

Well, after all, if she knew where he was, what would she do? Call him? Say, "Oh, Terry, please?" Not Vivia.

She dressed, wondering how to kill the time before she could go to that part of her life that was worthwhile, the club, the band, the music. When the front door opened she assumed it was just her mother coming home and she didn't look up. She sat on the couch, one leg crossed, foot swinging.

"Poor little girl, all alone," said Liz.

"Oh, Liz," she said, glad to see her sister. She leaped up, hugging Liz.

"My, my," Liz said. Then, looking at Vivia's face: "Hey, what's the problem?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Don't give me the oh, nothing stuff. I know you."

She had to talk, felt a desperate need to confide. And who else but Liz? "Oh, it's silly. It's just that while I was

washing my hair a plane came over low and I ran out, thinking—”

“That it was that navy flyer?” Liz asked. Vivia nodded. “As a matter of fact, I’ve been meaning to ask you about that. It seems to me that I’ve heard very little about a man you were so dead set on marrying just a few days ago.”

“Oh, he was called back to duty,” Vivia said. No, there was no way she could do it, no way she could tell anyone, even Liz, what had happened to her.

“Let’s have a cup of coffee,” Liz said.

“Ugh.” She drank a cup anyhow. Liz tried to get her to talk more about Terry. She did not cooperate. Liz seemed preoccupied, though, and when she began talking, so quickly, so simply, Vivia felt cold shock spread through her.

“I came over for a reason,” Liz said, not looking at Vivia. “Don’t tell Mother and Dad, if you see them before I do. I want to tell them myself. I’ll be leaving quite soon.”

“Oh, no,” Vivia gasped.

“It’s something I have to do,” Liz said. “I hope you can understand, dear. I’m not deserting you. It’s just that I can’t sit around doing nothing—”

“Your work at the hospital is a long shot from being nothing,” Vivia said. “We’ll still have sick people. Someone has to take care of them.”

“Vivia, think for a minute about all the boys in your class who have already enlisted or been drafted.”

“Sure, I know, but—”

“It’s even more evident in my age group,” Liz said. “Almost every man I know is in the service. Even Mark.”

“What would Mark say about your going into the navy?” Vivia asked, grasping at straws, lonely and helpless already.

“He approves,” she said. “We talked about it. He thinks it’s going to be a long and cruel war. He understands how I feel, that I have to do what I can to help. I think you can understand that. You feel that you have to sing, don’t you?”

Vivia pouted. “All right. I can dig that. When will you be leaving?”

“In just a few days. I go to Great Lakes first.”

“Where in hell is that?”

"Don't use profanity," Liz said almost automatically. "Up east somewhere. Near Chicago. It's for basic indoctrination. Then I'm going to ask for duty in the Pacific theater."

"Where Mark is," Vivia nodded. Yes, she could understand. It wasn't only that Liz felt a patriotic need to serve, it was simply Liz missing Mark, knowing that he would be gone for a long, long time, and doing something to go where he was.

"Where Mark is," Liz said with a quiet little smile.

And soon it was night again, with the sheer joy of standing in front of all that power, hearing the trumpets so loud, so close, moving her hips with the beat. She did "Mad About Him Sad About Him Blues." The band riffed, saxes low and gutty. There were whoops and applause. As she sat on the bandstand she saw a navy officer making his way through the dancers. He was a nice-looking man, not too old, neat, wings. He beckoned to her. She leaned forward.

"May I have this dance?"

"Sorry," she said, "it isn't allowed."

"Later?"

She smiled. "No. Sorry." But as the long evening progressed she kept seeing him. He was at the bar and then in front of the bandstand when she did her second set. He was still there when the band finished and Rudy sent Rocky, the drummer, out with Vivia to see her safely on the last car home. The navy officer was leaning against a lamppost when she came out.

"Miss Wilder?" he called, moving to meet them.

"Sorry, buddy," Rocky said, "the kid's on her way home."

"I'd like to talk to you for a minute," the officer said. "Terry sent me."

For a moment there was a quick flare of resentment. She had, she decided, come to hate Terry thoroughly. Why, then, did the mere mention of his name cause her heart to race?

"If I could be allowed to give you a ride home?" the officer asked.

"Not a chance," Rocky said. "Buzz off, sailor."

"What about Terry?" Vivia asked, the name coming hard to her lips.

"Well, it's sort of confidential," the officer said. "I have my car. I can drop you off and tell you."

"It's all right, Rocky," she said. "He's a friend of a friend."

"Rudy said to put you in the car," Rocky said.

"I'll be fine, Rocky. This gentleman—"

"Frank Chambers," the officer said.

"Frank will take me home."

"I'll have to ask Rudy," Rocky said stubbornly.

"Go ask him, then," Vivia said. Rocky looked at her uncertainly and went back into the darkening club. "Let's go, Frank," Vivia said.

She had a bad moment when she saw the low, gleaming dark Hudson. "Is it yours?" she asked, as Frank opened the door for her.

"Yeah, I loaned it to old Terry," he said.

Once he was in, before he started the engine, he offered her a cigarette. She took it, to give her hands, which were trembling slightly, something to do. He was silent as he pulled out of the parking lot. On the street he grinned at her.

"Well, where to?" he asked.

She gave him directions.

"Hey, I know this little place, stays open late. I could use a nightcap."

"Thank you," she said, "but it's been a long, hard night. I have to get home. You said Terry sent you."

"Sure, good old Terry."

"Well?" she asked.

"Well what?" he retorted.

"You said he had a message for me."

"Oh, sure. He said to tell you hi and that he was being kept pretty busy and that I should come up to Frisco and keep you company."

Being handed from one to the other like the soiled merchandise she was. "You turn here," she said coldly, but he passed the corner.

"That little place is just about five minutes from here," Frank said.

"Either turn at the next corner," she said, "or stop the car and let me out."

"Ah, baby," he said, "the night is young and you are so beautiful."

"Stop the car, please," she said.

With a grunt, he slammed on the brakes and pulled to the curb. The street was deserted. The city was dark in the blackout, the moon waning.

"When you get back," she said, opening the door, "tell Lieutenant Terry Allen that he has me figured wrong. I am not something to be passed on to a buddy."

"Hey, listen, you got it all wrong. Actually, he showed me a picture of you and I begged him to give me your name so I could meet you."

"He has no picture of me," she said, swinging her legs out from the low seat.

"All right," he said sullenly. "Look, I'm not going to put you out in the street. Get in and I'll take you home."

She hesitated. She'd missed the last cable car and finding a taxi would be impossible. "I would appreciate it," she said, closing the door. "Take the first right."

He smoked in moody silence. "Listen," he said at last, after she'd directed him to the street that led toward her home, "I'm sorry, okay? Let's forget Terry and start all over."

"There's nothing to start."

"Maybe Terry gave you a raw deal, huh? Hey, I'm not like that. Old straight and honorable Frank Chambers, that's me. Give me a break. How about I call you next time I get a pass?"

"Before you're shipped out to fight for home and country and mom and apple pie?" she asked.

He laughed. "That line, huh? Yeah, I've heard it from him before. Told you he was on the old *Lex*, I'll bet."

"It doesn't matter."

"Listen, Terry has this little inferiority complex, you know? I mean he can't, or thinks he can't, get a date without making himself seem glamorous and daring. Hell, he's just like me, in training. Neither of us ever saw the *Lex*, but you can't blame old Terry too much. It's just the way he is."

"I don't give a damn how he is," she said.

"Listen, I'm in town through tomorrow. How about I pick you up and we have a little ride and some lunch?"

"Did Terry tell you that I was a pretty hot number?" she asked, looking him in the face, seeing only the shadowy outlines of nose, eyes, mouth in the dim glow of the instrument panel. "Did he tell you I was easy?"

"Ah, come on. He didn't say anything like that."

"That's my house up there." It wasn't. She was two blocks from home, but she didn't want another sailor knowing where she lived. "You can stop here."

"At least give me your telephone number," he begged. The car stopped. She was climbing out when he reached for her, caught her arm. "Ah, honey, come on," he said coaxingly.

"Get your goddamned hand off me," she hissed. "And go back and tell your good buddy how easy I was."

He shot away with a squeal of tires, leaving her standing alone, more shamed than she'd ever been. She imagined them talking, snickering, planning how good old Frank could get in on the easy pickings. It made her feel suicidal at first and then, as she walked toward her house, a growing anger mixed with determination.

She was Vivia Wilder. She had goofed, but it wasn't a fatal goof, not, please God, unless she'd been caught. She had a talent. Maybe, unless she'd been caught, it was even a good thing. She'd be thrown in the company of men in the career she'd chosen, and now she knew about men, once and for all. She knew about them and she felt, for the whole male species, a vast and total contempt. Her father, with all his morality, how had he been as a young man? He'd fought in World War I, in France. "*Oui, mademoiselle*, I love you. I will marry you if you'll only do ficky-fick with me." Had he used the line too? Men wanted to marry virgins, but they did their damndest to make sure there weren't any virgins left.

Well, Miss Vivia Wilder wasn't having any of it, no more. Marriage? And be like Mom? No. She'd make her own way in the world. She'd find a place to live. She was making, after all, fifty whole dollars a week. Maybe she could share a place with Ida Louise from Altus, Oklahoma. When the baby came she could watch it for Ida Louise in the afternoon, while the girl was working. And if she had a baby herself. . . . Hell, and double hell, no. There were ways. Who would know, though? She couldn't go to Liz. Maybe one of the men in the band would know.

She was still only eighteen, but she felt older when she awoke, cooked two eggs without breaking the yolks, and went forth into the afternoon. Ida Louise was thrilled by the idea, but explained that her room was just a teeny-tiny little ole thang with one double bed and they'd have to sleep together.

"And junior might just kick you right out of bed," Ida said.

"A chance I'm willing to take," Vivia said.

And then, with everything decided, everything changed again.

When she arrived at the afternoon rehearsal she found the band members and Rudy gathered around a neatly dressed man in a blue suit. "Just in time, kid," Rudy said. "This is Abe Having, Hollywood Committee for Camp Shows, Inc."

"Shucks, when you said Hollywood," Rocky the drummer spoke up, "Vivia thought he was here to sign her to a movie contract."

"Oh, I don't have the experience yet," Vivia said. "I'll need at least another week before I'm ready for the movies. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Having."

"Mr. Having was just laying the goods on us," Rudy said. "Shoot, Luke, you're loaded."

"Thank you," Abe Having said. "As you all probably know, Mr. Blake has been in contact with the U.S.O. about going on the tour. To date there's been no opportunity. Requisitions for entertainers are sent down to our organization by the services. I've been keeping you in mind, and this is the solution." He took a paper from his pocket. "It's typical G.I. form. It reads, *Immediately, dance band, eight to twelve pieces, female vocalist if possible*. I think that fits you."

"I wanta go to Hawaii," Rocky said. He swung into a burlesque hula and Having laughed.

"Sorry, this is the Blue Circuit. Home front. It consists of about a thousand or more army and navy installations in the United States. These are the posts with limited theater facilities or none at all. Sometimes you might be playing on the bed of a trailer truck or under the trees."

"I like life in the open," Rocky said.

"U.S.O. clubs, dance dates," Having went on. "I'll have some poop for you before you take off. Camp Shows provides transportation, scheduling, pays expenses. As you know, many of the U.S.O. performers are volunteers—"

Someone groaned.

"Yes, I know." Having laughed. "Most of our entertainers are not stars, and they have to make a living. Your pay will be union scale."

"Boy, you had me scared there for a moment," Rocky said.

Vivia was elated. Now she'd have something to tell Liz. Liz wouldn't be the only one doing something for the war effort. She'd be traveling all over the United States helping in her small way to build the morale of the fighting men.

"Now, when the army says immediately," Mr. Having said, "it means immediately. I understand your engagement here is finished this weekend."

"That's right," Rudy said. "Saturday night."

"I don't have the complete itinerary worked out as yet," Having said, "but on Sunday morning, early"—groans—"there'll be a bus for you. I do know your first stop. Fort Ord. In the meantime, I'll have the information for you. There are a few dos and don'ts for our 'soldiers in greasepaint,' as we call our entertainers. Nothing too G.I., just common sense. Until I can get you more information, any questions?"

"What are the chances of getting an overseas gig?" Rudy asked.

"In your case, very small. The Foxhole Circuit demands a big star. Oh, we have smaller troupes, but there just isn't any call for a dance band of your size. I assure you, however, that you will be making a great contribution in this country. There are millions of men away from home. Some of the newly constructed training camps are in out-of-the-way areas. Twenty or thirty thousand men may have descended on a camp where the nearest town has five thousand people and very limited entertainment facilities. That's where U.S.O. Camp Shows come in." He smiled. "One thing for sure, you'll get to see a lot of the country."

"From a bus," Rocky said disgustedly.

"What's your beef?" asked the piano player. "You're going off to play soldier."

"The bus is air-conditioned," Having said. He cleared his throat. "Time is short and the order for a band is pretty sudden, so while you're waiting for the information packets that will be given to each of you, it would be an excellent idea to get a physical examination. It's required."

"If you tell me I'm getting shots, I think I'll pass," Rudy said, grinning.

"Just smallpox. You all have probably had that already. But you must have a physical, something like you'd take for going to work in a food-processing plant or something. Your family doctor can do it, or any doctor."

Rudy was excited. "Best audiences in the world," he enthused, when Having was gone. "Millions of them, a captive audience. And, man, don't think they won't remember after this war. Give me a year playing camps and they'll be saying Miller, Dorsey, Goodman, and Blake." He was so excited that he called off the rehearsal. "Tomorrow we start early. Work out a whole new book. Lots of stuff for you, kid. Start thinking of things you'd like to do. That one Harry James just did would be great for you, and something torchy, low, romantic."

"'There'll Never Be Another You,' " Vivia said.

"Gee, I didn't know you cared." Rudy grinned, walking on air.

"It's a song, pal," Vivia said.

"You're putting me on."

She went from the club to the hospital, found Liz, excitedly told her the happy news.

"I'm very pleased for you," Liz said. "That's wonderful." And, a bit selfishly, feeling a mixture of emotions, she thought that now one problem was solved. Vivia too would be going away.

"So we're both going to be hitting the road," Liz said. "You before I do."

"Oh, gee, Liz, I'm going to miss you," Vivia said.

"Don't feel like a lone ranger," Liz said. It was catching, the slang phrases. Hard to keep them out of one's talk.

"Listen, do me a favor. Call Dr. Davenport and see if you can use your influence to get me in for a physical. Gotta have it, and you know how hard it is to get an appointment. Have to wait days or spend a whole day in the waiting room."

"Just a simple physical?"

"Yeah, you know, just to prove I don't have T.B. or something. Like getting a health card."

"I can do better than call Dr. Davenport," Liz said. "Come along. Get you fixed right up."

"Right now?" Vivia asked, shocked. "Hey, I haven't had a bath."

"Oh, come on," Liz said, laughing. She found a friend, an intern, drinking coffee in the doctor's lounge, explained the problem. Within minutes Vivia found herself out of her clothing, scantily covered by a hospital gown, mounting the table with the cold sheets, breathing deeply while a chilly stethoscope probed, saying ah, looking into a little light that made her blink.

"A horse should be so healthy," the intern said. "Any special problems you want to tell the doctor?"

"No, not really," she said.

He was so young. He grinned at her. "Now what does 'not really' mean? Heck, this is a freebie, may as well take advantage of it."

"Oh, I'll pay," Vivia said.

"Forget it. Your sister has pulled me out of more than one jam. Now what's the 'not really'?"

She flushed. Maybe she should have gone to Dr. Davenport. At least he knew her. A girl just didn't talk about things like that with a stranger. But, then, he *was* a stranger, and she might have had to do some explaining to Dr. Davenport. There was another thought too. Could a doctor tell she was not a virgin? What if he could and told Liz?

He was looking at her questioningly. She had to make a decision. And she was a little worried about the continuing bleeding.

"Well, as a matter of fact," she said. "It's the curse, you know? I mean, it won't stop."

"You're in luck," he said with a smile. "I'm going to specialize in gynecology." He went to the door. "Have to have a nurse in the room for an examination of that type. No objections to your sister?"

"No," she said slowly, thinking, Well, whee, here it hits the fan.

Liz said, "Why haven't you mentioned that you've been having problems, Vivia?"

"Oh, it's not all that bad. Just a spotting, that's all."

"For how long?" the doctor asked, as Liz positioned her, draped her, put her heels into the cold metal holders.

"Oh, couple of weeks. Nothing serious. I just thought . . ."

Spread open. Something probing. "Hmmm" from the doctor.

"Stop humming," she said.

"Hmmm," he said.

"Just relax, darling," Liz said.

"Liz," the doctor said. "Come over here a minute."

They buzzed in a corner as she tried to see over the drapes covering her knees. "What are you guys talking about?"

"It's nothing," Liz said. "He just wants to call in another doctor to see you, that's all." But something in her face gave Vivia a chill.

"What is it?"

"Oh, probably nothing," Liz said. "Just relax. Cold? Want some cover?"

"No, I'm fine."

The other doctor was older, going gray. He asked her as he probed and felt, how long she'd been bleeding. There were, thank God, no personal questions beyond that.

"Now I'm going to take a tissue sample, Miss Wilder," the older doctor said. "It will feel like a light pinch. Won't hurt at all." It caused her to wince and then it was over. "Miss Wilder," the doctor said to Liz, "we'll have the results this evening, if you'll check with me. And I suggest that you admit her immediately. We'll know more after the lab tests, but—" He shrugged. "One way or the other it has to come out, and the sooner the better."

"Hey, wait a minute," Vivia yelled. "What has to come out?"

"I'm sorry," the older doctor said. "I thought they'd told you."

She knew real fear, was near tears. She was so often near tears these days, she thought. "All they did was whisper," she said.

"You have a growth inside the uterus," he said. "It's quite a large one, and that's the reason for the bleeding. We're running a test to see if it is one of the nastier ones or, as it probably will be, if it is benign. At any rate, it will have to come out. Your sister will handle things."

"I don't understand," Vivia said, looking from one to the other, her eyes riveting Liz's. "A growth where?"

"Inside your womb, darling," Liz said.

Oh, God, she thought. He did that to me. No, that was silly. If it were a large growth it couldn't have developed so quickly after— She laughed. The high-pitched, crackling laugh drew Liz quickly to her side. "Now, Vivian."

"It's all right," she said, smothering the laugh, clenching the edge of the draping sheet in her hands and putting it between her teeth. For she was thinking that, if Terry hadn't, then she might not have known about the growth until it was . . . too late. And the thought that she might owe Terry Adams something, after all, made her want to howl with maniacal laughter.

And then it hit her. They were talking about an operation, and the band was leaving this Sunday. "Liz, I can't. I can't have an operation. I'm leaving Sunday."

"We'll talk about that later," Liz said. "You come along. Get dressed. We'll have to call home and let them know."

"They won't care," she said, sinking to the depths. Everything had been coming her way and it was all just a trick. She'd just been in the wrong lane.

"Don't be silly."

She still couldn't believe it as Liz checked her in at the admissions desk. She called Rudy on the pay telephone and he said, "Good God, kid."

Then she was in a room and Liz was there and then her mother. She couldn't taste the food when it came. "Eat it now, Vivian Ruth," her mother kept saying. "You'll need your strength."

And then the graying doctor was there, a nice little smile on his face. "The lab rushed through the tissue sample. No worry. It's a benign tumor. So we don't have to worry about nasty things."

"Cancer," her mother said. "Oh, dear God."

"No, no, there's no concern. The tests are negative," the doctor said. "But we feel that an immediate removal is indicated. With your consent."

"I'm of age," Vivia said, with a burst of indignation.

"We'd like both your signature and that of your mother as next of kin," he said.

"Oh, Liz?" her mother said.

"Yes, it's best," Liz said.

"The band," Vivia said. "They'll have to leave without me."

Rudy was standing beside the bed. "You're supposed to be playing," she said.

"Left it with Rocky," he said. "I just talked with your sister, kid. Listen. Don't worry, you'll be all right."

"Rudy, I won't get to go with you, and the army said a girl vocalist."

He shifted uncomfortably. "Look, Vivian you know this is a great break for me."

"Sure, Rudy."

"What I'm trying to say is this. You're gonna be tied up here for a month or longer, you know? Oh, hell. You're the greatest, and you're going to be better, but—"

"I think I understand," she said. "You're going to have to get someone else."

"That's about it, kid," he said sadly. "I wanted to come over and tell you myself. You understand."

She cried herself to sleep. And then there was the morning and a haze of being poked and prodded and shaved and washed and the feeling of movement and then a pain that seemed to fill her from her toes to her head and a long, hazy time during which she might or might not have seen her mother and Liz. And then she was looking up into her dad's face.

"Ah, awake?" he asked.

"Dad, oh, Dad."

"You're fine," he said. "It's all over."

"I'm so sorry," she said.

"For what? It wasn't your fault."

"Was that really Dad here?" she asked Liz during her next lucid period, after she'd vomited with a force that made her hurt all over.

"Yes."

Later, the pain still there but not as bad, her head fairly clear, able to drink some broth and some water, she asked, "Liz, what did they do to me?"

Liz sat on the side of the bed and took her hand. "The tumor was, as the doctor told you, benign. It had been growing there for a long time, and it finally started you bleeding. It's gone now."

"Along with a part of me?" she asked.

"Your uterus."

"My womb."

"Yes."

"I can never have children."

There were glistening tears in Liz's eyes. "Yes, darling."

Vivian smiled. "I heard an expression for that," she said. "They took out the workshop and left the playpen."

"Vivian Ruth," Liz said with a little smile.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard it."

"Nurses hear everything, dummy."

"Not that I'll, uh, start playing."

"You'd better not. You'll be normal in every respect. And there are even blessings that go along with it. No curse, for example."

"No sanitary pads, ever?"

"Not after the operation heals completely."

"Not all bad," Vivian was saying.

But when she was alone she thought of Ida Louise and that little bump on her stomach that kicked now and then and she was moody and sad. And then she thought of the band. They were gone. Rudy and all of them, off on the bus to Fort Ord and then all over the country and all she had to look forward to was going home in a few days to a place that would never be the same. And then Liz came in to say good-bye and she couldn't keep back the tears.

"Hey, I'll be home again in a couple of weeks," Liz said. "This is just an indoctrination course. They teach me how to salute and fill out navy red-tape papers. I'll see you soon."

She walked the hallway in her dressing gown, grew stronger. "A horse should be so healthy," her favorite intern kept telling her. And because of Liz she received a lot of special attention and spent time in the nurses' lounge with girls who had known Liz, two of whom were planning to follow her into the navy as soon as they finished school. Then she was in the family car, feeling just a little faint from having moved around so much, and her mother was telling her how she'd put new curtains in her room to make it brighter and her dad wasn't cold now at all.

She spent a lot of time in a lounge chair in the backyard, rereading *Gone with the Wind* and weeping happily for poor Scarlett. She took long walks around the neighborhood. It was as if she'd gone into a hibernation. E.O. Gardner came over to tell her he was off to take his physical for the Navy Air Force. He came back three days later in his zoot suit, looking a little crushed.

"No wings yet?" Vivian asked.

"No wings ever," E.O. said.

"Oh, E.O."

"It's me eyes," he said, blinking and putting his hands out in front of him like a blind man. "Man, I mean I can't see for raw apples. I'm 'arf blind, lady. I can't even see your funny-looking face."

"Oh, E.O., I'm so sorry," she said.

"Well, no sweat, G.I. My number's up anyhow. Got my greetings while I was trying to be patriotic and enlist. How about that?"

"Everybody's going," she said. "Liz, now you."

"Hey, I might be seeing her someday, you know?"

"How's that?"

"Well, can you picture me in the infantry?" he asked. "Heck, the rifle I have to carry would weigh as much as I do, not to mention the pack. Or the Marines?"

"What are you going to do?"

"There's a program to train people to be navy corpsmen, you know, guys who go out on the battlefield and treat the wounded."

"That's dangerous," she protested.

"Not nearly as dangerous as being a dogface," he said. "I've been thinking. Doctors make a lot of loot, you know, and the war won't last forever. The training might give me a head start toward med school."

"Well, that's wonderful, if that's what you want," she said.

"Well, maybe I can watch the F-4-U's flying over," he said. "You. You're back on your feet pretty good. Up to a wild night of jitter-bugging?"

"Gee, not yet," she said. "Wish I were."

"We'd make a great team," he said. "Well, gotta fly. I mean go. I'll come for a good-bye kiss before I go off to be a medical hero."

"You'd better."

"Sure, sure," he said. "Keep it clean, hear?"

She was almost her normal self, just a bit weak, when he came back, took a wet, laughing kiss on the end of his nose, kissed her on the cheek.

"E.O. Gardner, you take care of yourself, now."

"Oh, I've got two mascots with me," he said. "Smoo and Glue. They'll spot Jap bullets for me."

"Which is Smoo?"

"The yellow one."

"Smoo, you look nice. Take care of this idiot."

"Yes, ma'am," E.O. said for Smoo, out of the corner of his mouth.

She'd been doing a lot of telephoning, hearing about classmates who'd enlisted or were being drafted, comparing notes on summer things with girlfriends. Her mother had joined a bandage-wrapping group and was away two afternoons a week. She was alone in the house. When the telephone rang she had a mouth full of summer melon. "Mummmmf," she said into the mouthpiece, thinking it was one of her friends.

There was the not-often-heard long-distance-crackle of lines extending into the far distances. "Miss Vivian Wilder?"

She swallowed the melon, almost choked, croaked, "Yes."

"Hey, kid."

"Rudy?"

"In person. Hey, you on your feet yet?"

"Yes, I'm fine," she said. "How's the tour?"

"Good and bad," he said. "The good first. Great audiences. They're eating us up, all except this cow I hired as a so-called singer."

She felt a little surge of hope.

"Look, kid, how soon can you get out of Frisco?"

"When's the next plane, bus, or train?" she asked, excitement growing.

"Well, this cow can't carry a tune and she's homesick. Look, we're on the way to some dump called Camp Hood, Texas. I don't even know where the hell it is, except you have to cross a lot of desert and we're somewhere to hell in western Arizona. Be there all weekend. I got the number of the U.S.O. club. Got a pencil?"

She raced for a pencil, wrote down the number. "Find out how you can get here. Honest, I don't even know the nearest town, but you can look at a map or call the army or something. If you can't get here this weekend, call and we'll tell you where we're gonna be next. Got it?"

"Rudy, you saved my life and I love you," she said.

"None of that jive in a well-run band," he said. "Business, business."

"I'll be there this weekend if I have to hitchhike," she said.

"Reet," he said. And was gone and she did a little

dance across the room, long, slim legs flashing from the neat, wide-legged white shorts.

"Well, Vivian Ruth," her father said, "I guess I'm just behind the times. They are changing, what with women in the army and all. I guess it's a job that needs to be done."

"Dad, you'll never know how much I thank you," she said, giving him a hug. "You'll never know."

"Just you be careful," her mother said.

The train was packed, soldiers, sailors, Marines. Some were going to new stations, some home on furlough. Many would be going overseas soon. They were young and they were loud and happy and dirty, for the train had no air-conditioning and it was early July and hot in the great American desert and the coal soot sifted in the open windows along with sand and they stood and sat where they could find a place to put down a duffle bag. As the coolness of evening helped a bit, Vivian wiped perspiration from her face, saw that her handkerchief was soiled from soot and dust, smiled at a young soldier across the aisle who had pulled out his harmonica and was playing "Home on the Range."

"Do you know 'Tumbling Tumbleweeds'?" she asked the harmonica player.

"Sure."

There were already many miles behind her, between her and the home she'd left only once before. The strains of the song took her back to younger years, lying in bed on a summer morning with KPO sending out the Sons of The Pioneers, Bob Nolan's big voice leading. "*See them tumbling down.*"

One by one voices joined in. One red-haired sailor had a nice tenor that harmonized well with hers.

"You have a nice voice," one of them said.

"Thank you." She smiled, with that white blaze of teeth. "You too."

"Got it calling in the cows," he said.

"The South," she said.

"Georgia."

"And you admit it?" she asked.

Laughter. Perched on the arm of a seat, aisles full of them in army tans, Marine suntan, navy white. Young voices singing "Boots and Saddles," "Down by the Old

Millstream." The Georgia boy finding a cigarette paper and playing along nasally on a comb. Yes, oh yes, she had a job and she was doing it.

Camp Hood baked in almost one-hundred-degree heat. The Saturday afternoon performance was on a raw plank stage in the open air, an olive-drab tent half providing some shelter from the sweltering sun. She would have been cooler in shorts, but she wore her nicest white formal and looked out on a sea of young faces, some with hats off to show nearly scalped heads.

"You," she said, pointing to a young recruit with a sunburned, almost barren pate. "Where are you from?"

"Chicago," he yelled back proudly.

"And you admit it?" she asked, giving him that blaze of a smile to cheers, laughter, boos.

"Is you is or is you ain't my baby? The way you're acting lately makes me doubt."

Cheers, whoops, whistles.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Rudy said with a flair. "Miss Vivia Wilder."

For the first time in her USO career, she heard it for Miss Vivia Wilder that wild, hooting, cheering, whistling sound coming joyfully from fifteen thousand male throats, the sea of faces stretching far, far from the make-shift stage, men seated up front on hot sand, others kneeling, standing, sweat pouring from them to dampen their fatigues and darken the sturdy cloth.

"Oh, do I love you," she said into the mike. "Oh, how I do love every one of you."

The sound was heavenly thunder.

She began to add a bit of dancing in Arkansas, at Chaffee. Seas of faces, cheers, long legs flashing from slits in her evening gown, slits she'd planned carefully with a seamstress, on the way through Dallas. Just enough to show leg to the knee.

Ten thousand voices singing along in Missouri as she acted as cheerleader and song leader to the tune of "Pistol Packing Mama." Artillery booming in the distance on a moonlight night in North Carolina, a dance date, Fayetteville girls recruited to be dance partners under strict chaperone supervision, dancing with a lean and rugged man who jumped out of airplanes.

"You're putting me on," she said. "They have to throw you out."

"Most of the time." He grinned. "But if you were on the ground I'd go out the door without a 'chute."

"Ladies and gentlemen, San Francisco's finest product, a gift to you, the army, and the state of Georgia—Miss Vivian Wilder."

How nearly she'd missed it, all of this. If the "cow" hired by Rudy had been able to carry a tune, if she hadn't gotten homesick. . . . It scared her to think of it, because she didn't know how she'd ever have lived without it.

"You, soldier, where are you from?"

"West Virginia."

"And you admit it?"

"Singing the cow-cow boogie, in the strangest way, come-a-tye aye yippidia."

"Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Vivian Wilder."

SEVEN

"ENSIGN Wilder," screamed the CPO, standing with his ruddy face pushed close to Liz's. "This is not a potato sack, it is a uniform, and as such it is to be treated with respect."

"I fell," Liz said.

"Silence in the ranks," the chief yelled. Giggles came from the rear ranks and his face seemed to purple. "Eighteen years in the navy and they do this to me," he bawled. "Make me a nursemaid for nurses."

He walked away from the scraggly looking line of women in blue, turned, looked at them with open displeasure. "How can I teach you to march if you don't know your left foot from your right?"

A more appropriate question, some of them felt, would have been "Why should nurses know how to march?"

They could understand the fire training. "Fire on a ship is one of the worst things that can happen at sea. When your house catches fire, you walk out and let the firemen put it out. If you're on a hospital ship in the middle of the Atlantic, you've got no place to walk to."

Short nights and long days, a basic military indoctrination course crammed into two weeks under a hot Illi-

nois sun only occasionally moderated by a breeze from the Great Lakes. And although they were officers, they were also mere recruits and were made to salute repeatedly until the training chiefs were moderately satisfied. They spent hours watching training films that were sadly out of date, and more hours learning the intricacies of the navy's double-duplicate recordkeeping system.

Liz had heard men talk of the impersonal, ego-shattering, deindividualization process that was an accepted part of any military training. The discipline was essential for a front-line soldier. Instant obedience to orders could save a man's life in combat. Many of the first group of navy nurses to go through the Great Lakes facility were put off by the training—until they heard from Sue Dauser, Commander of the Navy Nurse Corps.

"Some of you might think we're being a little rough on you," she said, smiling like someone's mother from behind her rimless glasses, white hat square on her graying hair, the four white stripes on the blue jacket gleaming. "You may feel that it is your duty to assist the doctors and that you are, first and foremost, nurses. I do not disagree with that, but remember this. We've already lost girls in this war. Right now we have nurses in Jap prison camps, those who stayed with the troops on Corregidor and Bataan. A battlefield wound needs to be treated quickly, and as the war goes on you'll find yourselves getting closer and closer to the front lines. Perhaps, one day, something you resented here might save your life."

Liz left Great Lakes by train, resigned, somewhat, to being always told what to do, when to do it, and at what pace. She felt like a small cog in a vast machine. And although she didn't feel like a soldier, she could salute with some precision and say "Yes, sir" with the best.

The war news was still grim. The Japanese had invaded the Aleutian Islands in early June, and were building bases on the islands of Attu and Kiska. There was no sign of a U.S. summer offensive. But when a letter from Mark caught up with her in Fort Pierce, Florida, she read suspense between the lines. The letter, noncommittal and having passed the censors without being black-penciled at all, contained a charged feeling. He was "somewhere in the Pacific." He wrote of deep blue seas and fathomless skies and sunny islands and American

men who were undergoing advanced training. And, he wrote of his love for her. But he said he was not sorry he'd made the decision to follow the troops.

Now and then she had seen his dispatches in the San Francisco paper, and she had heard that some of them were being picked up by other papers. She had never doubted that Mark would be good at his job. But she also recognized that he was doing what others had been doing since the onslaught of the war. He was marking time, trying to find something positive in a global war that was going the way of the Japanese and the Germans. In effect, he was writing color pieces about American boys far from home, how they were going to take the measure of the Nips when they had the chance, how they were of high morale and splendid condition. He said that if butter was short on the home front, relatives and friends of the men who were serving overseas could take comfort in the fact that it was plentiful in the enlisted men's mess, that the American fighting forces were the best fed, the best cared-for, the most eager to fight troops in the world.

Liz, receiving a packet of his dispatches from her mother, thought he was at his best when writing about the men with whom he came in contact. She furrowed her brow and tried unsuccessfully to remember her geography when reading his "think" pieces.

She shared a room with two nurses in a B.O.Q. at the Amphibious Training Command of the Atlantic Fleet at Fort Pierce, but the schedule was so tight there was little time for forming attachments. Moreover, no one knew where she would be sent once the brief training was over. At each opportunity Liz pressed her case with Chief Medical Officers to be assigned to the Pacific theater. She was always assured that there would be little problem.

The commander of the training unit at Fort Pierce told her, "Look, Ensign Wilder, it's going to be mostly an army and air corps show in the E.T.O. Oh, we'll supply transport and when we start hitting back we'll provide landing craft, but that's a long time in the future. The navy's main theater will be the Pacific. Out there we've got some scores to settle. Pearl, the *Lexington*, the old *Langley*. The Japs got in their licks against us and the British in the Java Sea, and made us look pretty bad

in the Coral Sea. But it won't be long, and we'll need navy nurses there by the thousands. Just be patient. Learn all you can. Be ready."

On a Sunday afternoon, she sat in the quarters with a map of the world and tried to put it all together, using two of Mark's pieces as a guide.

"Anyone who has not flown or sailed across a wide stretch of the mightiest of oceans," he wrote, "has no true comprehension of global distances, or of the far-flung sphere of influence already developed by the early Japanese offensives."

The left half of the map, showing the eastern Pacific and the southern Pacific, was a mishmash of small dots and lettering in red and black and blue, with Australia standing out below the Malay archipelago, huge in pink. Through Mark's eyes, Liz began to understand. Glutted by huge conquests of territory in China, the aim of Japanese warmakers was to secure what they called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, meaning that the Japs wanted to control all territories from which an offensive could be mounted from the east. And they had been making great strides.

With the invasion of Attu and Kiska, in the Aleutian Islands, Japanese forces were within theoretical striking distance of the U.S. mainland, and only a hop-skip-and-jump up the Aleutian chain to the Alaskan peninsula. It was discouraging for Liz to look at the map, to see the vast area of ocean and islands controlled by the Empire of Japan. Anyone who thought it was going to be a quick and easy war was full of navy beans.

But, from "somewhere in the Pacific," it was Mark who first alerted Liz to the fact that what had once seemed another defeat, had perhaps been a turning point. It began in the Coral Sea, where the Japanese scored what seemed to be overwhelming victory, sinking the *Lexington* and damaging the *Yorktown*. But carrier planes under Rear Admiral Frank J. Fletcher had struck at a Japanese invasion force making landings on Tulagi, in the Solomons, sinking one destroyer, three mine sweepers, and four landing barges. And the main Japanese invasion force, obviously aimed at Port Moresby, in New Guinea, lost one light carrier and one cruiser. So many Japanese planes were lost that the Port Moresby invasion force had to turn back to Rabaul. But things there were by

no means clear and Mark, like every man writing about the war, was restricted by the need for security. He could only speculate and he was permitted to use announced figures of Japanese losses in pointing out that the Midway invasion had been turned back, with the loss of four great Japanese aircraft carriers.

Liz wrote that she was having her own naval experiences, making practice landings from LCVP's at the Amphibious Training Command. The letter had hardly been posted to a Pacific theater APO when she received orders to return to San Francisco. She sent Mark a picture of her and two nurses standing in the open lip of an LCVP on the banks of the Banana River, smiles belying the heat of the Florida sun, dressed in the jaunty overseas cap, dark, thick, hot, issue hose, sturdy shoes, knee-length skirts, and a Mae West life preserver strapped over her tunic.

She had a few days at home. Vivia, her mother told her, was not so good at writing, but the last word had come from Georgia and she was apparently enjoying her tour. Most of Liz's friends were gone, the men to war, the women married or away on their own training jaunts. She wrote letters to Mark, dozed in the sun of the pleasant San Francisco summer, and thrilled to the announcement that U.S. forces had, at last, taken the offensive. It was August 7, 1942, and the Marines had gone ashore on a place called Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands.

"Which canal?" her mother asked. "Is that something like the Panama Canal?"

Liz had not heard from Mark for weeks but he was, she felt, there with the Marines. And only her orders relieved her mind. Soon she'd be out there too.

It was becoming more and more difficult for her to assess her feelings for Mark. Old friend, sure, but was there now something more, or was it, as he'd said, only absence making the heart grow fonder? Mark Fillmore had been in her life since she could remember, and although their social lives had been separate, he'd always been there. She missed him, missed the easy small talk, the sometimes rather probing discussions, his willingness to listen to her gripes and little hurts. Every girl, she felt, needed a Mark Fillmore in her life. But she was not quite sure how she'd feel sitting across from him at the breakfast table, perhaps with one of his children sitting

with them, her hair up in curlers. Old Mark? She just could not picture him that way. Her letters were warm, chatty, informative. He continued to tell her of his love, living up to his threat—or promise—to woo her. She made no acknowledgment.

The navy commands and an ensign obeys. She took to the ordered spot her blue and white issue uniforms, a few personal items, found herself stacked three deep in narrow cots with five other girls in a tiny cabin, speculated with everyone else on their eventual destination. That it was the Pacific was obvious. Otherwise they'd have been shipped to the East Coast. Sailing out of the Golden Gate for the first time was an eye-misting experience, for she had no idea when she'd be back. Then, making acquaintance with the complete field hospital being transported on the aging, converted passenger liner, passing the long days at sea, her realization grew that the destination was not the balmy Pacific of her dreams, but the North Pacific. The Bering Sea. Dutch Harbor was on the shore of the largest of the Aleutians, Unalaska. Five hundred miles away there were Japanese troops on Kiska, busily building bases.

The first person she saw in the new hospital recently built by the navy's construction unit, the Seabees, was one of Vivia's friends from home.

"Liz? Liz Wilder?" E.O. Gardner asked, leaning forward a little as he stood, in corpsman whites, in the aisle of an empty ward.

"Ensign Wilder to you, corpsman," snapped Chief Nurse Ethel Johnston.

"It's all right, ma'am," Liz said. "He's an old friend."

"Hey, Liz," E.O. asked, grinning widely. "You didn't happen to bring any new records? All we got here is Caruso and Guy Lombardo."

Part Two

ONE

OFF to the right, in a rain coming straight down with an all-penetrating, flattening force, a single mortar shell burst. The jungle screamed back in a startled, harsh, bird sound. The drumming, dulling, pervasive roar of rain seeped through treated canvas, beaded the interior of the tent where everything was sodden and mildewed. But Mark slept through it, the burst of shell, the steady drip of condensation on his bare left foot, where a stinking, itching rot was already beginning to form between his long toes. For three days he had not slept for more than a few minutes at a time.

The tent, a two-man officer's affair, was furnished with a small metal table on which sat Mark's portable typewriter, covered by a GI poncho, the cot on which he slept, and his pack containing a few remnants of the chow issue he'd carried ashore with the Marine Raiders on Tulagi—coffee and biscuits, meat and beans, vegetable stew, a couple of candy bars, rations designed to last until field kitchens could be set up.

The island of Tulagi lies directly to the north of the central hilly section of Guadalcanal, where Marines of the 1st Division faced Jap-held heights up to eight thousand feet. Tulagi is flanked by Florida Island and by the smaller islands of the Olevuga and Buena Vista groups. Mark's choice to go ashore with the Raiders on Tulagi, rather than with the main forces at Guadalcanal, had been a good one from a news standpoint. He felt, and he was writing it in his head as he fell quickly to sleep, that at least sixty of the young Americans who made a non-tourist stop at that scenic Pacific island should receive Congressional Medals of Honor. The sad part was that most of them would have to be awarded posthumously. And the official line was—people were reading it back home at that very moment—

On August 7, 1942, U.S. Marine Units made landings on Guadalcanal, Tulagi and adjacent islands in

the Solomon chain against negligible opposition from Japanese forces. Beachheads are secured according to plan and the forces on shore are moving inland to eliminate the remaining Japanese resistance on the island of Guadalcanal.

Mark woke up in an inky dark to the sound of a million insects and a distant firefight, the sharp, distinctive ping of Jap machine guns answered by the heavier, more deadly sounding U.S. automatic fire. He was thinking of Billy Gene Carnes, wondering what PFC Carnes would have said about the phrase "negligible opposition."

Mark had met the lanky, often moodily silent PFC at an advanced training base outside of Wellington, on New Zealand, an island he'd like to return to someday, maybe with Liz. The snow-covered mountains of the Tararua Range soared upward beyond the base, making it a place of beauty. It seemed unlikely that men were training here to assault a Jap-held position—somewhere. No one knew where.

Getting there had been one of the more surprising and pleasing experiences of Mark's thirty years. The logistics of the trip alone were cause for musing wonder. He'd left a San Francisco summer aboard a troop ship, destination Australia. He saw a bit of Pearl, the wreckage still there but the place humming with a new sense of purpose and vitality, spent a night sleeping in the belly of a B-17, arrived in wintertime Australia and was met by a tight-lipped major in Army ODs who hustled him, unshaven, dirty, grimy, red-eyed from lack of sleep, into the headquarters of one of the more surprising men of his generation.

Once retired, this amazing man had been recalled to active duty by F.D.R. in 1937. Fifty-seven years old then, he was now sixty-two.

"I've been looking forward to this, Mr. Fillmore," said General Douglas MacArthur. "I've admired your writings for some time."

Baggy pants, floppy hat, the everpresent corn-cob pipe. And Mark couldn't believe it. Hell, he was just a city editorial writer.

"If people had listened more to men like you," MacArthur said, "we wouldn't be in this mess we're in right now."

Mark didn't know what to say. He rubbed his bearded chin and felt filthy. "Sir," he said, "sorry I didn't get a chance to neaten up." He was dressed in suntans, only the initials USMC on the pocket.

"I can promise you, Mr. Fillmore, that it will only get worse," MacArthur said. "But sit down, sit down." Mark sat in a hard, straight chair. MacArthur paced in front of a window. "If you ever write of this interview," MacArthur said, "I will publicly call you a psychopathic liar. However, as I said, I admire your work, Mr. Fillmore. I want to see more of it. I want solid-minded men like you with me to let the American people know how we're treating their boys, to let them know we're determined to blast the Nips from every foothold in the Pacific all the way back to Tokyo. Some of these yahoos—" He paused. "Not all of them, mind you. Some are good men." He sat down, looking at Mark from those hard eyes. "We are, as you so often pointed out, woefully unprepared for war. But, thank the good God, we have the means and the determination to do something about it. They hit us just seven months ago, Mr. Fillmore, and I don't have to remind you that this is off the record when I tell you we're almost ready to hit back."

"That's good news, sir," Mark said, still a bit stunned to be singled out by the Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area. Mark was also uneasy because he'd written of his belief that a commanding general should be with his troops, regardless. MacArthur had been given a Medal of Honor, the medal received by his father more than fifty years before, for the stand he'd made on Luzon and on the Bataan peninsula, before leaving the defeated troops to surrender under General Wainwright.

"How familiar are you with the setup out here?" MacArthur asked.

"Well, I'm still trying to adjust," Mark said evasively.

"Roughly, we've divided up the Pacific into two zones, one under my command, one under Nimitz and the navy. Our jobs are the same, to hold the line of communications open to Australia, to contain the Japs, to defend our west coast, and, most important, to prepare to go on the offensive. That's why, Mr. Fillmore, I've pulled you off your plane without giving you a chance to rest and clean up, because I don't want to see you get shuffled aside somewhere and miss the action."

"That's very kind of you, sir," Mark said, thanking his lucky stars for having been able to see and write about a need for preparation before the war. He'd had no idea, although he occasionally received kind words from the Pentagon and other Washington sources, that he'd made such an impression on the military.

"Basically, you have two choices," MacArthur said. "I'd like to be able to order you to stick with the army." He smiled. "Being a bit prejudiced in that direction. But I'm afraid Chester Nimitz is going to be able to move first. I think I can guess your choice."

"Well," Mark said, "I'm eager to get to work, sir. As you said, I'd hate to miss the action."

"Just don't get too attached to the Marines," MacArthur said with a wry grin. "Because we army boys will be creating some news too. Like to have you back with us when it happens."

"I'd be flattered, sir," Mark said.

"And now I know you're tired," MacArthur said. "I've arranged for you to have transportation out to the 1st Marine Division's training camp. That's where the action is."

Dazed, the hours moving swiftly, he found himself getting into and out of aircraft, on and off boats, seeing Americans everywhere, amazed that in such a short space of time, with the Jap Navy enjoying the superiority of the seas at least up to the time of Midway, so many men could be brought to these faraway countries.

And apparently the word was out. What Mark Fillmore wanted, Mark Fillmore got. It was almost embarrassing, at times, to be treated with kid gloves, as if he were a visiting senator instead of a one-paper war correspondent. And what the Marine officers knew, Mark soon knew. It wasn't much, just that things were going to get exciting, and soon.

He did features about the friendly competition among the American services, how each man took pride in his own particular branch. Along this line he encountered the Raiders. Most Marines considered themselves the elite shock troops of all the American forces, and the idea of having an inner-elite within the elite didn't sit well with them.

PFC Billy Gene Carnes, on pass in Wellington, was sitting at a table in a pub, minding his own business and

reading for the third time the last letter from his Ida Louise. The place was filled with other leathernecks. Billy Gene didn't drink. He'd always been taught that it was wrong. Okay, so the Bible spoke often of wine. He just felt that drinking was wrong and he had little patience with those who drank and, especially, with those who drank and couldn't handle it. The brigs were always full of Marines who couldn't hold their liquor.

So, when two 1st Division leathernecks started a loud argument near his table, where he sat in a stiff-backed privacy, he looked up from under dark, bushy eyebrows and frowned. His was a pretty imposing frown, backed by six feet four of Oklahoma rangy muscle, but there were two of them and that gave them courage. They started needling him about being a Raider. No one loves a fight more than a Marine. As the insults flew, a silence fell over the pub, and Mark Fillmore sitting at the bar, turned to see what was happening.

The two drunken Marines were reaching for high points of wit. "Raiders ain't so tough," said one.

"Raiders gonna furnish the burial details to bury dead Japs killed by real Marines," said the other.

The tall PFC rose. "You guys wanta hear a story?" he asked, a little smile on his face.

"Oh, sure," said one of the Marines.

"Well, now you listen close and learn something," the PFC said. "Now you picture this in your mind. There's this company of 1st Division Marines out in the boonies on a thirty mile, see? And all of a sudden, like, they're walking down between two ridges and on the top of one ridge there's a Raider and he stands up and waves his hand and yells, 'All 1st Division Marines are mama's boys.'"

"Knock off that shit," growled one of the Marines.

"No, wait, that's not all the story," Billy Gene said. "So the sergeant, he says, 'You, Private, go up that hill and teach that Raider a lesson.' So this gyrene goes running up the ridge and yelling what he's going to do to the Raider and after about ten minutes the sergeant gets worried and says, 'You, you, and you, three men, you go up and see what's happened to that private.' So these three gyrenes, they go charging up the ridge, yelling and promising to do great damage to that Raider and after about fifteen minutes they're not back. So the sergeant

looks up and there's this Raider up there on top of the ridge, yelling and waving. 'All 1st Division Marines are mama's boys,' he yells. So the sergeant says, 'Third squad, a whole squad, get your butts up there and teach that s.o.b. a lesson.' So this whole squad goes charging and yelling up the ridge and about a half hour later one of them, just one of them, comes back. 'Sarge, Sarge,' he gasps, 'they tricked us. They's two Raiders up there.' "

There was a silence as the faces of the two Marines got red and a laugh broke out down by the bar and one of the Marines moved quickly, throwing a left that was blocked easily by the tall PFC.

"Now I don't wanta have to hurt you boys," Billy Gene said in a pleading voice as the two of them started circling him. It happened quickly. To Mark, it seemed to be a mere blur of motion, but he got enough of it to see that the PFC had some boxing training. One of the Marines was sitting, dazed, on the floor and the other was out for the count. Outside there were whistles, Shore Patrol never far off. Mark had a sudden urge to talk to that PFC, so when he saw him duck for the back entrance, Mark followed. In the cool, starlit night, Mark hurried to catch up with the PFC. Billy Gene stood there on the street, well away from the noise and confusion of the pub, and eyed Mark warily.

"You looked as if you knew how to get out of that place," Mark said, not wanting to test the PFC's quick reflexes at all. "So I followed."

"I always plan a line of retreat," Billy Gene said. "It's training."

"Looked as if you had some ring training too," Mark said.

"Golden Gloves, that's all."

Mark introduced himself. Billy Gene showed no signs of being impressed. "All the Raiders as handy with their fists as you are?"

"They don't teach us hand boxing," Billy Gene said.

"Hey, I know a place that's a little quieter," Mark said. "Buy you a drink?"

"Don't drink," Billy Gene said, turning to walk away.

Mark became fascinated with the training of the Raiders, having been made aware of the unit by the fight in the pub. He met the hard-eyed Colonel Edson, watched a session during which Raiders practiced a form of bare-

handed combat that could be quite deadly. He poked around and, although no one really knew what was going to happen or where they were going, everyone was sure that Edson's Raider unit was going along with the main 1st Division force to crack a particularly tough nut.

To show that it was a small, small world, when Mark spoke again to Billy Gene Carnes he found out that Billy Gene had a wife who was expecting a baby in San Francisco. While looking at recently arrived snapshots, he saw a familiar blazing smile on a blond girl.

"Name's Vivia Wilder," Billy Gene said. "She and Ida Louise are right friendly."

That brought it all very close to home. Mark suddenly imagined Billy Gene's pregnant wife back there wondering what was going on with her man, and the idea of following one small unit into a tough situation suddenly became important to him. He left New Zealand with the Raider unit aboard a real rustbucket of a ship, a ship with no modern pumps. Within a day the decks were filthy, the men filthy from lack of washing facilities. As yet there'd been no hint of their destination, but it was obvious that this was no drill. This was the real thing, and, somewhere north, when their little convoy joined with the main units and cruisers, battleships, troop ships, and carriers, Mark stood with Billy Gene up on the bow, just as the sun was rising from the blue Pacific waters, and was awestruck.

Mark learned the secret before the troops were told. On a Monday morning in late July a boat came with dispatches and he was invited, along with officers, to a dingy office in the lounge. A wall was plastered with maps. He moved close. He'd been doing some reading and some studying and Pacific geography was fresh in his mind. They'd been sailing toward the northeast, and they were now probably somewhere in the Coral Sea Basin, to the northeast of Queensland in Australia, and he could picture the rest of it, the large mass of New Guinea to the northwest, the chains of Melanesian islands to the north. And the maps showed that it was the Solomons. Guadalcanal. Particularly, and of the most immediate interest, the small scale maps showed the Raiders' objective, the island of Tulagi. South of Bougainville, largest of the group, the chain was divided into two nearly parallel lines, Guadalcanal being in the westernmost chain.

It was already growing considerably warmer. During the steaming days Marines stripped to the waist, sang, played cards, talked about the girls back home. Others sat in the broiling sun and honed bayonets endlessly, moodily promising what they would do to the Japs.

The first offensive effort was to be thrown at an island where there was no dry season, where over one hundred inches of rain fell every year, a jungly, hilly, equatorial island that not many people in the world had even heard of.

As July became August and the convoy moved slowly, in great zigzags, a mimeograph from the commanding officer was circulated.

The coming offensive in the Guadalcanal area marks the first offensive of the war against the enemy involving ground forces of the United States. The Marines have been selected to initiate this action, which will prove to be the forerunner of successive offensive actions that will end in ultimate victory for our cause. Our country expects nothing but victory from us and it shall have just that. The word failure shall not even be considered part of our vocabulary. Good luck and God bless you and to hell with the Japs.

Marks missed the initial naval bombardment of Guadalcanal, for the Raider force had split off from the main convoy to attack another island. He could hear and see it, low on the horizon, the mutter of guns, the distant smokes, and word came that the 1st had landed easily and was moving inland. A mass of flames low, faraway, was said to be a Jap ship burning, fired by air attack.

"I won't promise you that this will be a piece of cake," said a briefing officer. "Our intelligence reports indicate that there are only about four hundred and fifty men on Tulagi, but they're all fighting troops, no labor forces. Our idea is to hit 'em where they ain't, on the northwest, here. They have their defenses concentrated here, in the southeast. We go in, get up on this ridge, fan out, and hit 'em from the rear."

"If you want to see the action," Colonel Edson said to Mark, "you can come with me."

They had been routed out long before dawn and fed a huge breakfast. All around, the landing craft were cir-

cling into their assigned positions. Men climbed down the webbings on the sides of the ship to board the landing craft. A cruiser stood offshore from a low, heavily treed beach and lashed out with big guns that set the jungle to smoking. Square-winged F-4-F's from the carriers flew low overhead, dived, sent tracers lancing down onto the jungled shoreline. Colonel Edson's boat was lightly loaded, officers split up in separate groups so that a direct hit on the landing craft would not deprive the force of all command. It circled astern of the transport as the assault boats cut white wakes for the shoreline and then, under the steerage of a navy coxswain, pointed its square prow toward land and moved slowly in. Mark didn't even get his feet wet. The terrain was thick bush. The first troops to reach shore had had an unopposed landing. Only one man was killed. The sniper who killed him was then flushed out of his tree by a mass of fire that almost tore him to shreds.

Mark attached himself to Billy Gene's weapons platoon. In three hours they had covered about a mile and a half toward the ridge that was their objective. "How are we ever going to find the frigging Japs in this mess?" a sweating, panting Marine asked, hefting his pack, about fifty pounds worth of ammo, to a more comfortable position. He needn't have worried, for, as the jungle thinned and the ridge rose up, the Japs found them, machine guns cutting down those in front, snipers opening up from the rear. They had let the platoon pass before opening fire.

Mark found himself trying to dig a foxhole with his fingernails, hearing for the first time the distinctive rattle of Jap automatic weapons fire, the Raiders opening a counter fire, taking cover, the man with the field radio cranking furiously, calling out for help.

"You all right, Fillmore?" Billy Gene Carnes asked, crawling, low, knees and elbows digging into the mud, to lie nearby.

"I know now why they said be sure to bring a fresh change of skivvies," Mark said.

"The bastards are in caves," Billy Gene said.

The lieutenant in charge of the weapons platoon had been hit in the first crossfire. He was lying in full view, in a small, muddy opening in low brush, toward the

ridge. From off to one side a man was calling, in a low voice, "Corpsman, corpsman."

He had no way of knowing, but Mark was making a basic and fundamental observation. No matter how large the mass of men involved, war narrowed down to the individual and, at best, to a few men nearby. For in the din, in the sphincter-tightening knowledge that someone over there is doing his damndest to kill you, there is only an intimation of one's own vulnerability, and in the sight of a Marine falling quietly, as if some giant force had cut his legs from under him, there is the sure and humbling knowledge that it might happen to you. And then there was the whooping clang of mortars and voices calling out ranges. "Up fifteen. Down ten." A cheer. But the mortar bombs were merely chipping stone from around the entrances to the well-fortified caves on the ridgeside and men were moving up, dashing from shelter to shelter. Heat and sweat and the buzz of insects.

Incredibly, he was alive. More incredibly Billy Gene was alive, moving his six-foot-plus frame forward, snaking along, seeking the fallen log, the smallest rock, grenade in hand. A long lob and a direct hit on a cave entrance, only to see the black egg shape come arcing out to explode outside the cave, merely adding to the din.

And how on God's earth, in the face of that withering fire coming from the concealed caves, the Jap .25 machine guns firing short, quick bursts, rifles pinging, could anyone move forward as the others were doing? They were leaving him behind, a bit ashamed, but unarmed. A correspondent was, theoretically, a noncombatant.

He could see Billy Gene lying on his back, yanking the pin from a grenade with his teeth, making an exaggerated gesture of releasing the clip, head nodding, counting, "One, two, three."

"Throw that bastard," Mark heard himself yell, and the grenade went lobbing away, Billy Gene rolling onto his side to make a mighty heave and the grenade arcing back out of the cave swiftly. A man screamed, leaped to his feet in agony, was scythed and silenced by a blaze of fire.

And firing could be heard on the flanks. Evidently the intelligence reports were wrong in stating that the Japs had defensive positions only in the southeastern portion of the island. A grenade exploded inside a dugout and a

small man staggered out, was met by a series of yells and a hail of Marine bullets. One by one the caves were silenced. Snipers fired from the flanks and above as Raiders crawled through fire to drop packaged dynamite charges directly into the entrance holes. Mark saw Billy Gene swing a satchel charge underhand into a cave, scramble up the rocks, little dust pocks showing machine-gun rounds striking all around him as the hill gave a mighty cough and the earth heaved up. A Raider leaped to the shattered entrance, blasted the interior with a BAR.

And at last they had gained the ridge. Behind them they left their dead to be properly tagged, in accordance with Annex E to General Order No. 3. Mark had no thought of food, drank occasionally from his canteen, had not made a single note, save in his observations written in admiration, horror, disbelief, and a pride so vast that at times he felt like weeping with it. And then they hit the Cricket Field at dusk and ground to a bloody, winded, hopeless halt. For around the flat area, once used by the British for their national game, the limestone walls of the cliffs were honeycombed with dug-outs and caves. The fire across the open areas was continuous. A mouse could not have lived out there.

He tried to sleep. The night was thick, with almost a solidity to the air, humidity added to a flat, sullen, torrential rain that felled the hurriedly raised tents and shelters. And after the rain the Japs came, breaking through the lines, cutting off an entire company, to within fifty yards of the command post near which Mark had placed his pup tent. The firing seemed to come from all sides, and above the sound of the firefight the scream of a wounded man or the hysterical sounds of multiple voices in a strange language.

In the sullen, steaming early morning sun the Raiders methodically cleared the southeastern end of the island, but the Japs were still in control of the Cricket Field. Mark was back with Billy Gene Carnes's weapons platoon. Billy Gene, having helped pioneer the method of clearing Japs from their holes, was having the time of his life. While several of his buddies gave covering fire, he crawled over the steep sides of the ravine. A satchel charge went into a hole and came flying out, blasting in the open air and causing him to yelp, for the explosion

had sent rock splinters against his legs. Twice more he tried to take out the cave, each time having the grenade or charge tossed back and then, yelling furiously, he went into the cave, grease gun firing from the hip. Mark never expected to see him come out alive. He did.

"Well, it made me mad," he said as he rested, letting others carry on the dirty work.

"Listen, tiger," Mark said, catching him alone and preparing to go back into the ravine, "why don't you cool it a bit? Think about that little girl back home in Frisco."

Billy Gene grinned. "You got a point there," he said.

But there was a pesky one high on the side of the ravine, and there he was again, adding a refinement to the dynamite bombs this time, wanting to end it, take this big, pesky one out all at once and get it over. He had to struggle to throw the package in, for he'd attached a five-gallon GI can of gasoline to the charge. It didn't get in quite far enough and it went off as he scrambled away, and there was a six-foot-four Raider roaring down the hillside, his pants blown away, a .25 caliber bullet adding to his speed as it made a crease about an eighth of an inch deep across the cheek of his rump. He spent the rest of the day trying to find a pair of pants big enough for him and went back, light bandage across his ass, to help with the mopping up.

On the main island, the landings, like the one on Tulagi, had been largely unopposed. Mark hitched a boat ride and joined the 1st on Guadalcanal to find that the initial objective had been secured. There were at least two other correspondents there, one of them the big-timer, Richard Tregaskis of INS. They were up front somewhere, the 1st having crossed the small Ilu River and the Tanaru. The prime objective, the airfield, had been reached, and still there was scant Jap opposition. There was a spirit of celebration in the air. A Marine had liberated a bicycle and was racing around in circles. There were abandoned vehicles, Jap trucks, an officer's car made by Ford in the good old U.S.A.

Mark had releases to get out. They went to the general's headquarters for censorship and then, quickly, he hoped, across the vast stretches of water. He wrote to Liz and began to feel displaced. Here on the Canal the action was spaced out, and he seemed always to be in the wrong place.

Try as he might, he could not be where the action

was, always missing it, hearing about the engagements secondhand, feeling that his luck had deserted him, knowing that Richard Tregaskis had a knack for being with the front elements. He began to feel a bit better when Colonel Edson's Raiders were transferred to the Canal and he was back among men he thought of as friends. Billy Gene had put on corporal's stripes, and he'd found battle dress to fit. But it was slow. There grew a feeling, sometimes expressed when he talked with officers, that it was too slow, that the situation was being taken out of the hands of the ground forces by more powerful ones. And gradually the realization grew that the navy and the Air Corps did not have control. The first air raid was followed by almost daily poundings and, in lieu of decisive ground action, there was only the secondhand excitement of watching the show in the sky as carrier planes did battle with the Jap bombers and Zero escorts.

On Thursday, August 20, thirteen days after the initial landings, those near the airfield saw a fine sight as fighters and bombers made their approaches and landed, giving the ground troops constant air cover. Without the bombers and the night shellings from submarines and Jap ships, the men felt that it would be over in days.

Of course, it was not. The sounds of a night firefight kept Mark awake, the heaviest fire coming from the direction of the Tanaru River. He got a colonel to confirm the scuttlebutt that the Japs had landed in force and moved by dark against Marine positions along the Tanaru. Mark arrived on the scene with American artillery booming, sending their deadly airborne cargo into a grove of coconut palms across the stream. Rifle grenades came across the river from the Jap positions, making a sound like mortar shells exploding.

Mark headlined his story *A RINGSIDE SEAT AT HELL'S POINT*. That was the name given to the sand spit across the Tanaru by the Marines who had held off the night attack. He did not write about the Marine dead. Surprisingly, they numbered only about twenty-eight. He did not write about the Japanese dead, not even after a body count totaled 871 dead Japanese. He walked along the river at Hell's Point to see them, like rotting sausages, bloated and shiny, some partly covered by wave-driven sand from the sea. It was a grisly lesson in human anatomy,

as immediate as seeing one's own skull in an X-ray and knowing that, in the end, it would come to that. Under the impact of war flesh melted, seared, charred, flaked away, was torn, ripped, blasted away, exposing shattered white bone and grinning teeth with absurd gold fillings, technicolor entrails hanging in obscene loops. The enemy had come, had been fresh. The equipment picked up in the grove indicated that he'd been well outfitted. But he had died. The Marines had the situation well in hand.

Offshore, their fate was in the balance as two naval giants skirmished and won and lost minor victories. August tired and grew old, and the island itself was the enemy, a single day without an air raid a small victory. Every darkness brought with it the uneasy feeling that this might be the night the Japs landed huge armies. And there was a feeling of helplessness as the air battles continued. Any man on the Canal would have given a month's pay for clean underwear and a night's sleep in a real bed, for hot food, for a chair to rest in for just a few minutes, for a break in the tropical heat, for release from eternal sweat.

Fresh-faced and cleanly uniformed young men landed their Wildcats and P-40's. They laughed as they described their aerial victories and, occasionally, they did not come back. Lumbering B-17's roared four-motored down the long tarmac and lifted off to seek out Jap naval units. The Japs struck back with air raids and attacks on the American fleet.

September. They'd been on the Fucking Island, as the troops called the Canal, almost a month. Even the gung-ho ones, like Billy Gene Carnes, began to wonder out loud when they'd be relieved. It was estimated that at least six thousand fresh Japanese troops had been landed by night during the recent period and the ground fighting seemed to grind on, nothing spectacular or decisive, but more a decaying tooth that hurt sporadically.

September brought no significant change in the terrible weather conditions: heat, damp, endless rain. Mark, summoned to the Raider camp, arrived in heavy rain and found himself involved in an amphibious operation. Colonel Edson's Raiders landed near Taivu Point, down the coast from the airport and the Tanaru, then went out on a ridge. The sound of the midnight battle told of its sav-

agery. With the day a dogfight took place over the ridge, snipers were active. When Mark went up on the ridge, the knoll where the Raiders had stood against a strong Jap counterattack was pocked by shell holes, black spots marking the detonation of grenades. In some places, dead American limbs entangled with those of young Japanese to show the intensity of the hand-to-hand struggle.

And amid a pile of dead Japanese, his BAR still in his hands, Billy Gene Carnes sat, eyes blackened, stomach opened by a bayonet. Thirty bodies were counted in the field of fire of his BAR. Mark stood there for a long time, feeling something go out of him slowly.

How do you write about a tall, lanky kid dying? You just say he'd died, and that he probably played an instrumental part in turning back the severe Jap attack. And you wonder how long it will be before the body snatchers identify him, push his dogtag between his teeth to lodge there securely. All bodies will bear identification tags, read Annex E to General Order No. 3. And you wonder how his wife, Ida Louise, back in San Francisco, an eon away but only a few thousand miles in distance, will feel when she sees the envelope from the War Department. Something goes out of you and you don't care much any more. You can't even get excited when things seem to be getting quiet on that Fucking Island, when land fighting slacks off and the reports all read "No Japs today."

You go to see the fresh troops. You can't write about that, not and mention their units. Men of the 2nd Marine Division. New troops. Virgin. Thousands and thousands of them in clean fatigues and shiny new helmets. And all along the beach, bleary-eyed, sodden, stained, the old boys look on and spit a stream of tobacco juice and scratch jungle rot and don't say a word as the virgins spout tough talk and kid the 1st about not being able to handle a handful of Nips.

"I think it's time for me to go," Mark told the general.

Vandergrift chuckled. "Hell, you're leaving just as we begin to see a few signs of civilization around here."

Arranging transport was the problem. He took to hanging around the airport, looking for a friendly pilot on the way to somewhere, anywhere, where he could hitch a ride that would end up eventually at Pearl. Tregaskis went out ahead of him, grabbing the chance to ride in a

B-17, with only a small detour for reconnaissance over Bougainville's northern tip. Later in the war Mark would read Tregaskis's account of that flight, and find his own mild in comparison, for there was only one brush with a Jap Zero when Mark finally got a hitch on a friendly PBY, and then it didn't seem serious, even with tracers lancing down over the slow-moving seaplane until it found shelter in a dense cloud. He wasn't even half scared. He had no intention of dying up there in the sweet, clean, bugfree air, not after having survived six weeks on that Fucking Island.

He had a packet of letters in his gear, unread, because they'd caught up with him while he was trying to arrange his transportation out and he'd wanted to savor them in an undisturbed moment. He arranged them in order and began reading. His little smile faded behind his four-day beard as he saw the references, obviously to the weather, that had been blacked out by the censors. But they had not cut out a remark that she missed trees, and another about some wildflowers. He'd been out of touch on Guadalcanal, but not so much out of touch that he didn't get the war news, if a little late. There were Japs on Attu and Kiska and the talk around the general's headquarters was that Jap presence in the Alaskan islands could not be tolerated. Everyone expected something hot to start up north in the near future.

"Damnit, Liz," he said aloud, causing the navigator to turn and look at him with a wry grin. He grinned back. His fatigues were riddled with rot, his shoes were falling apart. He knew how he looked and he didn't care. "One crazy one is enough," he said, not to the navigator, but to Liz.

Never in his life would he experience a contrast more striking as, within a few hours, he lifted off from the jungles of Guadalcanal and landed at Brisbane, hitching a ride into town, seeing the girls looking so pretty in fresh dresses, so carefree that he had to close his eyes for a moment, men in whites and tans and blues, men of several nations in clean uniforms walking in pairs, some staggering just a little, now and then trying to get the attention of the passing girls. Bliss was a hot tub, a soft bed, and waking to a ravaging hunger, wondering if he'd slept the clock round once or, guessing by the emptiness of his stomach, twice.

Having eaten his meal alone in the hotel dining room, he was too tired to think. All he'd wanted was to be on the way back to the east toward home, Pearl and then San Francisco. And then what? What made him so special? How could he even think of moving heaven and earth, if necessary, just to see his girl when Billy Gene Carnes would never see his again in this life?

But he felt sheer repugnance thinking about going back to another jungle to watch young men die while he spent his time scratching his jungle rot and putting down totally inadequate words on paper. It sent him to the bar where he found that although Australian bartenders don't know much about making a good martini, they do know how to slosh in the gin.

He had to focus hard to see the insignia on the uniform appearing beside him, a bird colonel. "Nice to see you back, Fillmore."

"Yeah," Mark said.

"Read some of your stuff from the Canal."

"Great," Mark said.

"When we got word that you were on the way out, the general asked me to look you up." A laugh. "You weren't hard to find. The bar was the first place I looked."

"Colonel," Mark said, "we gotta put bars all over. Create a brand new branch of the service. The Morale Corps. Send girls with big boobs to all the islands so that when a man comes in with his butt dragging he sees boobs and gets a stiff belt. Win the war in no time."

The colonel laughed. "I'll let you present the idea to the Joint Chiefs if you don't mind. Look, Fillmore, no offense, but I don't think you're in much condition to talk."

"On the contrary, I am in the mood to talk," Mark said. "I'd like to talk and talk about young men wading in mud day after day not knowing when some Jap bastard is going to lob in an eight-incher on his head or a Betty is going to fly over and drop five hundred pounds of H.E. on him while he's having to muck down through a foot of jungle rot to dig a foxhole."

"I get the impression it was rough," the colonel said. "But we've turned the Japs back outside of Port Moresby. We've got 'em moving back. We'll be going after New Britain after things are settled on the Canal."

"I won't be there," Mark said.

"Oh?"

"Yep, I've just decided. I want to feel the cool breezes on my face. I'm thinking of traveling up Alaska way."

"Ummm," the colonel said. "Scuttlebutt of that type got all the way to the Canal?"

"Nope, just some semi-intelligent conclusions," Mark said. "I think the contrast would be interesting. From the tropics to the far north. When's the show start?"

"It will have to be a summertime operation. You have plenty of time. I'm flying up to Moresby, by the way. Want to tag along and just have a quick look?"

Oh, shit and hell and damn and how much water and jungle could there be in one world? September in the rain, again, dogfaces instead of jarheads, but all the same, really, just young men a long, long way from home and endless sweat and dampness and his toes almost falling off and the dispatches going out and watching 32nd Infantry dogfaces go hell-for-leather against fortified Jap positions on a ridge and hearing the familiar protest of the jungle, the trees full of birds and now and then a direct hit and feathers flying and terrified monkeys screeching in protest.

It was to be the winter of Mark Fillmore's discontent, a miserable, hopeless, endless October and November. Christmas trees ran up the masts of the ships and the cooks broke their asses trying to serve a hot turkey dinner to everyone including the dogface in the forward fox-hole and there was a sameness about Mark's reporting, except when he was writing about the men, the individuals.

"Fillmore, damnit," said a newly arrived platoon sergeant, "why don't you write about something that matters? Tell the folks at home they're not doing their job. Tell 'em to send ice. Tell 'em to float down icebergs. Hell, I ain't had a cold beer in thirty days."

So he wrote about the lack of cold beer and the confidence of the American soldier, his humor and his ability to put up with conditions that were quite indescribable, and he cheered with the word that Bull Halsey had put forty-four thousand men on that Fucking Island out there to the east, brooded only for a while when scuttlebutt said the Japs were making daring evacuations of their men via destroyer runs and then it was over. In February the 43rd Infantry went into the Russell Islands to find no Japs at all.

He paused in Australia to see a man who was supposed to know what to do about jungle rot, got some vile-smelling medications, spent a night crouched in the belly of a Fort. He came down at Pearl to a bustle of activity, saw new and gleaming ships putting out to sail to the west, thousands of troops, congested streets, and then the Golden Gate below the wings of a big *Mars* clipper. To his vast astonishment, he was greeted in the office as something of a hero. A girl had been assigned to make a scrapbook of his dispatches and as she proudly showed him the vast collection, he knew for the first time he had become a national celebrity. His pieces had been syndicated all over the world. The *New York Times*, for example, on any particular date, would have headlines from the major news services, but somewhere, often on the front page, there'd be one of those sometimes amusing, sometimes wryly cynical, sometimes sad little examinations of a fighting man or a small unit datelined Somewhere in the Pacific, by Mark Fillmore. When he applied to the War Department for transportation and accreditation to the Aleutians, the speed with which his request was handled left him humbled, breathless. He spent only three days in San Francisco.

TWO

CHIEF Nurse Ethel Johnston was in her early forties. With a scarf around her head, dressed in baggy fatigues, she looked like a Slavic housewife doing the dirty work. She was a stern but fair taskmaster and she combined friendliness with a not-to-be-questioned air of command. Liz, put off at first by her brusque manner, grew to like her. During those first weeks at Dutch Harbor, in spite of her rank, Ethel pitched in and worked side by side with her six nurses and the corpsmen. The dispensary was sterilized and stocked, the small hospital scrubbed from floor to ceiling and brightened with an assortment of wildflowers that grew in profusion on the barren, always slightly chilly island.

It was soon evident that the chief enemy at Dutch Harbor would be sheer tedium. Although materiel was

being shipped in almost daily, weather permitting, and huge stockpiles of the thousands of items needed to wage a war grew alongside the docks on the main island, there was little real work for the staff.

The war seemed far away in spite of the presence of the Japanese on Attu and Kiska, down the cold chain of rocky and fog-bound islands that stretched outward toward Japan itself. It seemed to Liz to be a sort of rinky-dink war, with lumbering seaplanes, four-motored PBY's, actually performing as bombers, making runs with regularity over Kiska when the skies permitted. She read Mark's letters, sensing his despair, and agonized for him and for the men who were so far away, fighting under such different conditions. Vivia's brief letters always made her smile, for her younger sister was, as the saying went, in hog heaven. She was seeing more of the United States than Wendell Wilkie saw in 1940 when he gathered twenty-two million presidential votes against a man who had become a father symbol for the country and the world. Now and then there'd be a snapshot taken by some man in the audience who later delivered copies, and there'd be Miss Vivia Wilder on some sort of makeshift stage, often in a graceful dancer's pose.

Liz shared a room and confidences with Marcie Evans, who, within six months of Liz's age, seemed so much younger. Marcie was a small girl with thick, mousy hair and an engaging chipmunk grin. The other girls in the unit, all newly trained and all holding the same rank, Ensign (NC) displayed the usual variety of personality, but the static was kept to a low level.

There were days, even with a global war going on, when the hospital was empty. Then E.O. Gardner and his corpsman friends did their best to liven things up with impromptu dances in the lounge. E.O.'s cross was the total lack of anything "cool" in the meager selection of records. He spent a lot of time bugging the men on patrol boats and aircraft to try to pick up some new Miller or Dorsey sides, even if they had to raid them from the Japs on the lower islands. He had little success.

When Chief Nurse Johnston selected Liz to be nurse in charge of the graveyard shift, Liz didn't know whether to be flattered, or not. "Liz," the chief nurse said, "we could rotate. That would be fair, but I'm not merely con-

cerned with being fair. I want a girl on the night shift whom I can trust. I can't be everywhere."

Liz dragged her roomie, Marcie, along with her and, to a howl of protest, requested that E.O. be the corpsman on duty with them. "Hey, man, it's *night* out there," E.O. protested. But once assigned, he pitched in with a will, kept the coffee hot, kept the almost always empty rooms ever-ready, livened up the long, early morning hours with a bit of impromptu jitter-bugging whenever the radio picked up something worth dancing to.

The days were long enough, near the end of the brief summer, to allow for exploration of their surroundings. Dutch Harbor had one claim to fame, the hotel where Jack London had once stayed. The village was situated on a small island, a short ferry ride from the main island of Unalaska and the town of the same name from which all women had been evacuated. It was E.O. who organized the first trip over to Unalaska. There they found two souvenir shops, a restaurant selling hot dogs for the inflated price of fifty-five cents, a bakery, a few American traders, some native Aleut Eskimoes, and an island that, during the warm time of the long sun, was colored by brilliant wildflowers. From the heights they could look out over the cold sea.

The corpsmen had packed a picnic lunch. Marcie talked about her Bobby, in training to fly a bomber. She was wondering how she could get transferred to the European theater, for scuttlebutt had it that that was where Bobby would probably be sent. Already the British were mounting heavy bombing raids on Germany, and the thrust of propaganda seemed to be aimed toward the Nazis rather than the Japanese.

It was a nice day, and not even the total absence of trees could dispel Liz's mood of pleasurable idleness. She tried, laughing at herself, to see E.O. Gardner's two personal guardians, Smoo and Glue, and gave up.

"Some of us just aren't mature enough to tune in on them," E.O. explained, "but I've told them to sort of keep an eye on you."

Down below, the old *Salt Lake* was putting out to sea, surrounded by her torpedo boats. The pride of the area, she was the oldest heavy cruiser in the navy, and her crew lovingly called her "Snafu Maru." She worked in some of the most frustrating conditions faced by

American sailors, peasoup fogs, seas so cold that survival for a man in the water was limited to minutes, and always with the threat of being caught in a fight by superior Japanese naval forces. But out in the South Pacific other ships were fighting superior odds too, and the losses were terrible. There the war was furious, with Mark on some island with dying men, the ships and planes being dealt fire and shell daily. It seemed that Liz was being wasted, that she had been shunted aside.

They had treated a Russian sailor for a foot injury shortly after the trip across to the big island. E.O., proud of his skills, had been allowed to finish off the bandaging. He was doing his best to talk with the Russian in a mixture of jive talk and hand signals. During the Russian's stay in the hospital E.O. worked diligently and announced with satisfaction that he was "digging the Russian pretty good." He said they'd all been invited to visit aboard the Russian ship.

It was something to do. It was growing cooler, the days noticeably shorter. Liz dressed in blues, dragged Marcie out of the sack and got her ready, muffled a laugh when she met E.O. and the limping Russian in the lounge. E.O. had on his zoot suit.

"Jeeesus Christ," said Chief Nurse Ethel Johnston.

"Hey, Chief," E.O. said, "it's for the morale of the troops, you know? A touch of home."

"And so much against regulations that I can't even put a name to it," Ethel said. But she shrugged and they were off, the Russian chattering happily, E.O. getting a word in now and then. He'd arranged a ride on a patrol boat. It sat beside the dock and he scurried around, helping Liz and Marcie aboard, almost lifting the injured Russian sailor onto the boat while the crew threw off lines and looked at the two nurses at the same time. Liz was used to the looks and the good-natured flirting and never had any trouble with the men. She had the usual invitations, but no one was pushy about it. She danced with some of them, talked with most of them, looked at their pictures of the girls back home, heard their tales of rough seas and having to chip ice from the boat with axes in the winter. She, and they, were in this thing together. To the men, she was not just a woman but sort of a symbol of sister, wife, sweetheart, and as such to be treated with respect. She found her respect for them

growing with each day. So she kept her hair clean and brushed, her uniforms neat and pressed and she wore skirts because the men didn't like slacks.

She took her place behind the small cabin to be out of the wind and looked up to see E.O., resplendent in his zoot suit, striking a pose on the dock.

"Hey, Admiral," a crewman yelled, "get it aboard."

"Yes," E.O. said, looking out from the wide brim of his hat, hand twirling the chain that looped down almost to his feet. "It is now time to get this show on the road."

Lines were loosed, cast up onto the dock. E.O. put one hand behind his back, one on his stomach in a Napoleonic pose, lifted one outsized shoe grandly, and stepped for the gunwale just as the engine was thrown into gear. The boat jerked, leaving space between boat and dock, so as his outsized, pointed, ridiculous shoe caught the lower loop of his chain he tumbled, still in the Napoleonic pose, making a startled sound and hitting the cold water with a splash.

The helmsman quickly cut the power to the wheel. In the water there was only E.O.'s purple hat, the brim looking the size of a large washtub, and then E.O. was surfacing, sputtering, yelling. A life ring swung out on a rope and he clutched it, was hauled up, shivering, dripping, the zoot suit hanging in sodden ruin. Climbing over the gunwale, he saw his hat beginning to sink.

"Me hat," he wailed, and launched himself back into the frigid water, catching the hat as he went under, coming up with it in his hands as the life ring came down again and the patrol boat crew laughed and asked him if he wasn't freezing them off. He was, but he had his hat. He went back to the hospital draped in navy blankets, dried himself, moaned over the condition of his suit, "God, it's ruined, Liz. It's ruined. And now I'm just like everyone else. It was me personality."

"You still have the guardians," she said.

"Yes, but they're disappointed in me," he said, near tears. "You see, that's their national dress, and I was one of the few permitted to wear it, an honorary Blizzfttian."

"Drink this, honorary Blizzfttian," Liz ordered, giving him a hot cup of tea, "and be thankful if you don't catch pneumonia."

"Sorry to spoil the visit," he said.

"No sweat," she said. "I don't think I'd like Russian food anyhow."

Winter came suddenly in continuous rain, snow, sleet, fog. A ninety-mile gale blew, making it impossible to go outside. There was a word for the wind, *williwaw*, and it cut through the hood of an arctic parka like a chill knife. When it was possible to get outside the mud was ankle deep on the issue galoshes. Now there were more patients, men with frostbite on limbs and, in one terrible case, in the lungs. The loss of their first patient cast a pall of gloom over the small unit. The airman died just after three in the morning, during those remote, empty night hours when life always seems to be at its lowest ebb. Ethel Johnston had been with them to the end, and when it was over and the doctor sadly pulled the sheet up to cover the pale, dead face, Ethel left the room quickly. He had been just a boy, crewman on a Catalina that went down in a winter storm.

Liz needed to be alone, and she went to the lounge, leaving E.O. to move the body. She found the coffee hot, but strong from a long time on the burner, sat with the cup cradled in her two hands to feel the heat, trying to forget the chill of the boy's skin when he had been brought in. E.O. came in a few minutes later. He didn't speak. He poured coffee and sat down, his face averted.

"Yeah, well," he said, after he'd finished his coffee, and then he was gone. She saw a couple of other patients, made her rounds, found Marcie at the desk glumly filling in the report, could not stand to think that there was nothing left of the airman but that sheaf of papers and the lifeless body now in the morgue. Eyes misting, she walked down the hall. Ethel's door was at halfmast, half open, light coming from inside. As Liz passed she saw her, face lined with exhaustion, seated in a rocking chair, rocking slowly, and in her arms was a small furry something.

"Ethel?" she said, knocking on the half-open door.

"Ah, you've caught me," the older nurse said with a wry smile.

It was a monkey, a tiny-baby-sized furry stuffed monkey with big, funny eyes that, when the chair rocked, rolled around in glass sockets, the long tail hanging down from Ethel's arms to stand out darkly against her whites.

"You'll find about two ounces of Scotch in a bottle in

the drawer," Ethel said. "Greater love hath no woman than to share her last two ounces of Scotch."

"No," Liz said, having gotten the bottle and poured half of the brown liquid into one of the two glasses on the dresser. "I won't take your last one."

"No good drinking alone."

She poured. They sat there, drinking it straight.

"He came off with me," Ethel said, and it took Liz a moment to realize that she was talking about the funny little stuffed animal with the rolling eyes and silly, wide grin. He was covered with a soft-looking fuzzy material, a pretty shade of brown, but with faded spots, as if salt water had dried on the fur.

"I didn't want to come," Ethel said. "But someone had to. It was the last boat and some of the wounded were in bad shape and there had to be a nurse. We drew straws and I lost."

"Where?" Liz asked. Although she enjoyed a friendly relationship with the chief nurse, they'd never done any deep talking.

"The Rock. Corregidor. Lucy Anne bought this little critter just before December seventh, was going to send it home to a little niece as a Christmas present. We went into Manila and she fell in love with him. Carried him all the way. When I got the short straw she asked me to bring him out, said he wouldn't like a Jap prison camp."

"Oh, Ethel," Liz said.

"Ah, well." She smiled. "Silly, isn't it? Damned little stuffed toy. I promised to keep him for her. And there's something about him." She picked the silly animal up by his long arms and held him out. Liz, smiling, took the toy and felt the smoothness, the warmth. "You can hang onto him," Ethel said, "squeeze the shit out of him and he doesn't complain. He's a good listener. If you ever get into a jam and need someone to talk to who won't talk back, you can't beat Douglas."

"Douglas?"

"For, like old baggy pants, he shall return," Ethel said. She finished her drink in a gulp, made a face. "Think I'm crazy?"

"Not at all. There's is something about him. He's nice. Cuddly."

Ethel laughed. "Well, if you ever need him, all you have to do is whistle."

In her quarters at the end of the shift Liz lay there thinking of Ethel and of the boy who was dead and of how many boys Ethel had seen die. She clutched the pillow and cried softly while the wind howled outside.

March. Winter abating only slightly. The old *Salt Lake* took on four Jap destroyers, two light cruisers, and four heavy cruisers in heavy fog, sent men with shrapnel wounds, and for a few days there was a purpose to their lives and the few wounded received attention equal to none. Airmen came with arms almost severed as activity picked up with the weather. There was something definitely in the air. Good weather as May approached, and the bomb runs to Attu and Kiska went out as the harbor began to fill with transports and destroyers and cruisers, and Seabee units worked around the clock. It would be either Kiska or Attu. A lot of time was spent in speculation. How soon? That was the vital question, and Liz was among those who believed it would be later in the summer, when the weather was more dependable.

One day she looked up from the desk and saw that Mark had grown a moustache. She felt a surge of pure joy. "Oh, Mark, oh, Mark." And his arms were so good, so good, strong and warm and his sun-browned skin looked so queerly out of place in the far north.

"My God, you smell good," he whispered, and E.O. Gardner halted in his tracks and did a doubletake as Nurse Liz Wilder flew into the arms of a Clark Gable type with a soup strainer, laughing through a kiss that, after a while, silenced the laugh for a long, long moment.

The shift was just beginning. The chief nurse answered Liz's SOS, routed out a girl from the midday shift, sent Liz off on Mark's arm to pepper him with questions, to sit with him in a BOQ lounge and find herself talking, instead of listening, telling him of the boredom, the frustration, the endlessness of the winter, the howling *williwaws*, the cold. "But here I am going on, and where you've been makes Dutch Harbor sound like a picnic," she concluded guiltily.

"Balmy tropical islands, lady nurse," he said.

He looked thin, too thin. And there was a quality in his eyes she'd never seen before. "But how?" she wanted to know. "Why are you here?" The answer to her question became clear and, for an irrational moment, she almost blamed him. He'd been where the action was and

now that the action was coming to the Aleutians he was there, bringing the war with him, for the transports were there. "It's soon, isn't it?"

"Soon."

"And you're going."

"That's my job."

The USO had managed, with Seabee help, to construct a clubhouse. And now that the war was really coming to Dutch Harbor there was already a USO troupe there, an accordion player, a singer, a song and dance and joke man. They stood among the GI's, Seabees, sailors, airmen, and sang "Roll Out the Barrel." Mark had quarters in the BOQ. It was strictly against regulations for Liz to be there, but she was there, the show over, Mark acting the gracious host with a bottle of wine all the way from California, where, he told her, her mother and father were looking fat and sassy and some people even realized there was a war on as they bitched about rationing and sugar and egg shortages.

He talked about that Fucking Island, the word losing its shock in the way he said it, for it was nothing more than a descriptive term, a term of desperation to show how the Marines had felt about it. The wine disappeared. She found herself telling him about the boy who had died with frostbite in his lungs and about Ethel and Douglas and he didn't laugh.

"I saw a man run through a machine-gun cross-fire twice," Mark said, "once to get the hell out of there and the second time to go back and get his helmet, because he had his girl's picture in it. It was something to hang onto. Like your Ethel's monkey."

"What have you had to hang onto?" she asked. "I don't mind telling you, boy, some of your letters got a little wet with tears. Sometimes you were pretty down, even if you didn't say so in so many words."

"You," he said simply.

"Me and Douglas." She laughed. "But I don't have a tail."

"Just fantastic eyes and knock-out legs." He grinned.

"You're not so bad yourself, old boy next door," she said, adding the last quickly because he was growing quite serious.

"The WAC's are using me for a pinup boy."

"I'm jealous."

"I want to kiss you."

"Okay."

For she had decided. No one knew what was going to happen. Some of Mark's dispatches had shown that he was right up there where the fighting was, and the guess was that any invasion of the Jap-held Aleutians was going to be a rugged operation. Mark Fillmore loved her and she respected him more than any man in the world, with the possible exception of her father. She wasn't quite sure what love was. She knew what passion was, had experienced it not at all lately but many times when she was in school and dating. So what if she'd never felt it for Mark? What she felt for Mark had to count for something. She went into his arms and giggled uncomfortably as the kiss deepened and then, much later, she was lying on the neatly made GI bed and the kisses went on and on and all she felt was a sort of motherly warmth for him, a willingness to do as he wanted, not objecting as he became more and more aroused, touched her, whispered heated love to her, felt his hands on her breasts and legs as a sort of friendly touch, thinking, Well, why not? You have to lose it sometime, girl, and you're over twenty-one. Who better than old Mark?

She underestimated him. He sat up, breathing hard. "Damn, Liz, damn, damn, damn."

"What is it?"

He grinned, his hand shaking. "Not yet, huh?"

She sat up, put her arms around him. "Mark, if you want me. . . ."

He pushed her away gently. "Thanks. You're a wonderful, warm girl." He grinned ruefully. "By God, you would too, wouldn't you? But it just isn't there for you, is it?"

"Oh, Mark."

"There's time," he said. "There's plenty of time."

THREE

"WHAT I'm gonna do," Rudy Blake said, walking down the narrow aisle of the moving bus, "is eradicate the word *bus* from every human language. Anyone who says *bus* to me will be immediately drawn and quartered. I will personally take an ax and a sledge hammer and some TNT and cut, crush, blow up every bus in the whole world."

"How many miles you figure we've been in this crate?" the piano player asked.

"Four billion," Rudy said.

"I'm gonna sleep for a week," the piano player said.

Others were sleeping then as the bus came down the rocky, winding, narrow road near Barstow and headed for the southern California desert. Vivia, having claimed, as usual, the undivided backseat, was lying on her stomach, a light sheet over her, zonked out. She awoke with the heat when the bus stopped and the band members piled out to get hamburgers at a little roadside cafe. She went out into the dry, hot air, pushed her hair, a little the worse for wear, up from her heated neck. Two dates in the southern California area and then home. Not a billion miles behind them, but a lot, the bus zig-zagging from Illinois to New Jersey, from Kansas to Mississippi and back again and in and out of Texas, which seemed to have more Blue Circuit camps than any other state. And she didn't regret a minute of it, not one minute.

"Looking forward to a furlough, kid?" Rudy asked, as they went back to the bus.

"Not really," she said.

"God," moaned a sax man. "Even the infantry gets furlough."

"I don't know," Vivia said. "I just feel like we're going to be slackers, taking a month off. A whole month." And out there in that wonderful, fantastic, huge country there were the millions of boys, boys who sat and stood and crowded around the stage and reaffirmed, with every performance, what her life was all about. She felt she'd be climbing the walls before a month was up. And there was

nothing sure for afterward. Rudy was trying, he was always trying, to get an assignment on the overseas circuits, and it was the same old story. She was sure that the Rudy Blake USO camp troupe B-465 would start off again to make the rounds of the Blue Circuit and, though that would be better than nothing, she wasn't quite sure that was what she wanted. The bus did get cramped and she had a tiny bit of a weight problem from eating junk food in a hurry and then splurging at some of the good service messes. And she'd *done* that, sung with the band before soldiers, airmen, sailors, Marines. She'd seen her name in local newspapers, but in the national news they talked about the stars who entertained in Australia, for example.

Of course, the experience had been wonderful for her. The best audiences in the world, always receptive. Freedom to experiment, to get her style hammered out. Rudy was just about her number-one fan and told her that the sky was the limit for her. He was going to try to get a recording date during the month off. He'd been working on some original arrangements and they'd gone over well, maybe not quite as well as when the band played one of the more famous ones, like "Chattanooga Choo Choo," but pretty well.

Two more dates. A navy crowd in San Diego, Marines up the coast, and then driving up the beautiful coast highway with those spectacular bridges and cliffs of the Big Sur country and then home, telling the boys so long and Rudy telling her to stay close, that he'd call when he had a studio rented.

She wasn't treated exactly like a star, but the next thing to it. Nothing was too good for her for a few days, with even her father seeming interested in hearing about the tour. And then she remembered Ida Louise. She'd never been much good at writing. She'd sent a couple of postcards—when was it? Way last September, she guessed. She found the little restaurant empty except for a girl she didn't recognize. "Help you, honey?"

"North Carolina," Vivia said.

"How'd you know?" the girl asked, brightening.

"I'm looking for a friend," Vivia said. "Ida Louise Carnes. She does still work here, doesn't she?"

"No, just me and Shirley," the waitress said.

Well, she couldn't expect the world to stand still just

because she'd been out on the road for a few months. She guessed that Ida Louise had had her baby, that good old Billy Gene had gotten his promotions so that maybe Ida Louise didn't have to work any more. Gee, she would have liked to see her, to know whether the kid was a boy or a girl. She got the owner's telephone number and called him from home.

"Ah, yes, the little girl from Oklahoma, the one whose husband got killed on Guadalcanal," the owner said.

"Oh, no," Vivia said. "But the baby. Was it a boy or a girl?"

"Well, Ida Louise left before the baby was born, going back home, she said. Said they'd be shipping her husband's body back there."

She had saved most of her money. Aside from new dresses, which were scarce, there hadn't been much to spend it on. She told her mother she'd pay for the long-distance call. There were three Carnes numbers in Altus, Oklahoma. The third one was the home of Billy Gene's family and she was told that Ida Louise was living back with her folks and she got that number and, after a bull market of calling operators, she heard the voice.

"Vivia, is that you?"

"Ida Louise, was it a boy or a girl?"

That little laugh that she remembered so well. "I wrote you 'bout it. Guess you didn't get it, huh?"

"Ida Louise? A boy?"

"Yes. Named him Billy Gene."

She didn't know what to say. Finally she said, "Ida Louise, I'm so sorry." It sounded phony and inadequate.

There was a silence. "Is he a pretty little boy?" Vivia asked, and that started Ida Louise chatting about her son, who was, indeed, a nice little boy showing signs of being as big as his father. And then there was not much more to say.

"Listen, Ida Louise, I'll write. I promise."

"That would be nice." And then the girl remembered. "Strangest thing," she said. "When Billy Gene was there on Tulagi and Guadalcanal he met a man knew you, a newsman named Mark Fillmore."

"Old Mark," Vivia said. "It's a small world."

"Had a letter from him. A very nice letter. Told me all about Billy Gene. I really appreciated it. You tell him, you ever see him again, that I did, will you?"

"Sure, sure," Vivia said. "Ida Louise, you're going to be all right, aren't you?"

"Oh, I'm fine, I guess. Good as can be expected. You have fun, Vivia. Sounds like you got yourself a real career. Billy Gene, he wrote me about seeing a Camp Show somewhere out there. He couldn't tell me where at the time, but he said the boys liked it and the girls were real pretty." She laughed. "Said not as pretty as me, but Billy Gene was always a great liar about things like that."

Around the camps they talked about men getting killed in training accidents and some of them had friends and brothers who were dead overseas and it was always sad to hear them talk like that, but somehow, a boy she'd never known made it seem almost real to her.

Rudy dropped a bundle hiring a hall with recording equipment to do some demo records and the month wasn't half over. Vivia wailed it out as best she could and it sounded great but there was something missing in the material. That something special just wasn't there in the original love song written by the piano player and the up-tempo thing done by Rudy. He had a man down in Hollywood who was supposed to get the demo all the way to Johnny Mercer at Capitol Records, but Vivia didn't put too much stock in it. And Mr. Having was in touch and sure enough, after the month's rest the band would be back on the bus, heading almost over the same route. The old Blue Circuit of U.S. training camps.

Rudy came around to give her the news. It was late in the afternoon. "Good news, kid," he said, when she opened the door. She introduced Rudy to her mother before she asked him about the news. "I've been taking good care of her, Mrs. Wilder," he said. "All the boys look out for her too."

"That's nice of you," her mother said.

Then he told her about a new tour of the Blue Circuit, and that he'd heard nothing from Capitol Records. Elizabeth Wilder, impressed by his manners and his fatherly attitude toward Vivia, offered coffee and pie with ice cream on top and that was when the telephone rang. The strange, empty, faraway sound that came down long-distance lines was familiar to her now.

"Long distance is calling Miss Vivia Wilder," said an operator, overemphasizing each word.

"Speaking," she said, hissing at her mother and Rudy who were trying to outdo each other in being polite, Rudy complimenting the pie, Elizabeth telling him how she appreciated his looking after Vivian Ruth. They quieted down.

"Miss Wilder? Bob B. Downs here." It sounded as if he'd said Bobby Downs and for a moment she was blank and then the letters appeared in her mind as if she were seeing them on a theater marquee. Her eyes widened. "Listen, I just heard that demo you did with some band and I've been hearing about you from all over the country."

When he paused in that characteristic way, as if waiting for a laugh, she said, "Yes?"

"I am impressed. Very impressed. Listen, I'm putting together a troupe for the U. S. O. Need a gal singer. Understand you dance a little."

"Vivian Ruth," Elizabeth said, standing, misunderstanding the numbed look on Vivian's face. "Is there something wrong? Is it Liz?"

"No, no," she whispered, frantically waving her mother away.

"I can't, of course, make you a definite offer by telephone, Miss Wilder, but I'm sure that if you could come down to L.A. and work out a little with my bandleader we could make an immediate decision. Expenses paid, of course. Send you some loot in advance if you need it."

"No, no, that's all right," she said. "When?"

"Yesterday," Downs said, and paused to wait for the laugh, which she gave. "Tomorrow."

"Where?"

She wrote down the address. Rudy was looking at her questioningly and for a moment she felt funny. He'd been so nice to her. But when she was in the hospital he hadn't waited too long to get a replacement for her. And for a chance to go with Bob B. Downs, old Bob B. with the funny eyebrows and the cackling, contagious laugh and film credits with people like Ann Sheridan and Rita Hayworth and all the big ones. Oh, gee.

"I'll be there," she said, and hung up.

"You'll be where, Vivian Ruth?" her mother asked.

She didn't answer. It was going to be a little difficult. "Rudy," she began, and stopped.

"Gimme the poop, kid," he said, looking as if he might already suspect.

"It's, well, that was Bob B. Downs."

"I see," Rudy said. He took a bite of pie and chewed thoughtfully. "Actually, kid, I've sort of been expecting something like that. You're too hot for a Blue Circuit dance band."

Filled with a sudden sadness, she went and knelt in front of his chair. "Oh, Rudy, can you understand?"

"Hell," he said, "what's to understand? Bob B. Downs. That's big-time shit." He flushed. "'Scuse me, Mrs. Wilder. Musician talk. Don't usually use it. Just when I'm hurting." But he opened his hands and grinned. "I wouldn't stand in your way for a million, kid. Go to it."

"There's no assurance that he'll like me," she said. "He just wants me to come down and work with the band."

"Probably Paul Welton."

"Oh, gee, do you think it's possible?"

"That's who Downs uses on his radio shows. And everyone's getting in on the act. If it is, you'll be made, kid. Welton could make anyone sound good. With you, he'll rise to new and unmeasured heights." He stood. "Well, thanks for the chow, Mrs. Wilder. Good luck, kid."

"He seemed so sad," her mother said a little later.

"He's a nice guy."

"Is it right for you to just leave him like that, when he's got another tour arranged?"

She didn't answer for a moment. She thought of those thousands of upturned whistling, cheering, yelling faces and how it would seem so much more exciting to be seeing them out there, all over the world. "Oh, he'll be fine," she said. "He can find another singer."

Paul Welton was not one of the barnstormers, the one-night-standers. Under contract to Capitol Records, he worked mostly in the recording and film studios and in doing special arrangements. He had a knack for backing vocalists, for showcasing them, and he listened to Vivia's version of "Blues in the Night" only once before he started making changes in the arrangement so that at times her voice was up there alone, with only a bass and a chunking guitar to hold it, and then he wrapped muted trumpets around it and she felt shivers go up and down her spine. Out front, Bob B. Downs grinned. She didn't

even go back to San Francisco. When the War Department sent down a requisition for a Camp Show, it wanted action, and she had to say her good-byes by telephone.

"No, Mom. I don't know where we're going," she said. "I just know that it's the Foxhole Circuit. Yes, overseas. Yes, I'll be ever so careful. Love you. Bye."

When you open this booklet you will have joined ranks with thousands of men and women in show business who are fighting this war in the way they know best. Your weapon is the gag; the sudden burst of laughter in the jungle; the sweet voice of a woman—*me, me, she thought*—carried to a group of tired men sitting on the ground; the intricate dance step; the cheerful beat of a piano competing with the sound of guns. Your work is morale.

Smallpox, typhoid, paratyphoid, tetanus toxoid, typhus, yellow fever, cholera. She felt like a pincushion and sick, oh, God, she was sick, and then there was an FBI man to give her a PSQ, Personnel Security Questionnaire. At first her mother couldn't find her birth certificate. Her passport pictures turned out to be horrible and there was no time to have others taken.

If you are going to a base outside the western hemisphere you will wear a uniform with the official insignia of CAMP SHOWS sewed on the upper part of the left sleeve of the blouse. This uniform has been designated by the War Department as official for overseas entertainers. IT IS THE ONLY UNIFORM YOU WILL BE PERMITTED TO WEAR, AND NO OTHER INSIGNIA OR EMBLEMS, OTHER THAN THOSE DESIGNATED, MAY BE WORN ON THE HAT, BLOUSE OR SHIRT. Wear your uniform with pride, for it is the symbol that you are participating usefully and honorably in the service of your country! WOMEN—At the Port of Embarkation Quartermaster Depot in the United States, women entertainers may buy the following items at low Army prices:

Anklets, wool
Stockings, beige cotton,
rayon

Stockings, knee-length,
wool
Pajamas, winter (WAC)

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Slip (WAC) | Overshoes, low; arctic |
| Panties, winter, summer (WAC) | 4-buckle |
| Vest, winter (khaki) | Gloves (dress leather, olive-drab wool, WAC work cotton) |
| Shoes, service, low; field | Necktie |

"Mr. Welton," she said, during a break in rehearsals, "did you hear the demo I made with Rudy Blake's band?"

"Bobby asked my opinion of it, yes."

"He's good, isn't he?"

"Oh, sure," Welton said.

"I was wondering if anything was ever said about Capitol releasing it or anything."

"It's not that good. Material didn't cut it," Welton said. "A hundred as good, a thousand."

But she felt a little better. She'd tried. He couldn't blame her for taking the chance to really make it big, to work with stars.

As a soldier in greasepaint—and in uniform—you are under military orders and must abide by all the rules of censorship. Before going overseas for CAMP SHOWS you will be required to sign an Oath of Secrecy. Its text is taken from the Espionage Act and it carries with it a maximum penalty of death, or imprisonment for not more than thirty years. Here it is:

I solemnly promise that I will not collect, record, publish, communicate, or divulge to anyone not entitled to receive same, any information which may directly or indirectly come into my possession as a result of my entrance upon a military or naval reservation under the sponsorship of USO-CAMP SHOWS, INC. or otherwise—with respect to the movement, numbers, description, condition, or disposition of any of the armed forces, ships, aircraft, or war materials of the United States, or with respect to the plans or conduct or supposed plans or conduct of any naval or military operations—or with respect to any works or measures undertaken for or connected with, or intended for the fortification or defense of any place—or any other information relating to the public defense which might be useful to the enemy.

Remember that oath. This is war, and the army means what it says.

NEVER give your ports of embarkation or debarkation if you travel by boat.

NEVER give your points of departure or arrival if you travel by air.

NEVER discuss the names of ships or vessels seen; the routes of convoys; the composition of convoys; other convoys seen en route.

NEVER mention troop concentrations.

NEVER discuss battle casualties, damage done to the enemy, or damage done by the enemy.

NEVER give air routes.

You are not allowed to take a camera, binoculars, or radio with you. You are not allowed to keep a diary. If a diary were lost and picked up by the enemy it might reveal names, places, concentrations of men and routes that might prove costly to us.

You must not accept any message, oral or written, to be delivered to anyone when you return home. This includes letters or messages from servicemen to their families.

You must not ask anyone to deliver a written or oral message for you in this country while you are overseas. All mail will come to you through your APO number. You must post all mail in army post boxes. Use V-Mail.

"Yeah, yeah," Bob B. Downs said, inspecting Vivian's new wardrobe. She'd chosen a silver lamé gown after finding with great pleasure and surprise that, while she wasn't looking, she'd developed some boobs. Almost as big as Liz's. And the gown seemed to suit the blondness, the slimness, and the slits were just right to show her dancer's legs.

"What we'll do," Bob B. said, "is after your gig I'll come out and we'll dance a little." He demonstrated and she caught on quickly, the old vaudeville buck and wing, a shuffle, going off to Buffalo, and playing straight man for him so that he'd get the laughs. He was the star.

DON'T GRIPE. There is always a good reason for inconvenience in a war zone.

DON'T WAVE THE FLAG. The fighting men don't

need your pep talks. Let them do the fighting. You do the entertaining.

DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF. If you think this is rough, wait until next week.

DON'T SYMPATHIZE TOO MUCH. Our men don't want to be wept on in public.

DON'T THINK YOU CAN TALK DOWN TO A GI AUDIENCE. The man in the front row in a PFC uniform may be a Ph.D.

DON'T WEAR OUT YOUR WELCOME WITH TOO MANY ENCORES.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR AUDIENCE. You'd better be your best. Shows have been laughed off the stage before.

DON'T GAMBLE WITH SERVICEMEN. People have been sent home for this. (Excessive drinking can be cause for instant dismissal as well.)

DON'T LIMIT YOUR ATTENTION TO OFFICERS. The men will resent it. Your reputation will travel ahead of you. The army has its own grapevine.

DON'T MAKE REMARKS or use gags that tend to show discrimination against any race, creed, color, or minority group. Leave stuff like that to Hitler.

REFRAIN FROM USING THE WORD "BOYS" whenever possible. The army has put a great deal of effort into making these "boys" men.

DON'T ARGUE with your fellow workers in public.

KEEP IT CLEAN. The men you will be entertaining are not sissies, but they don't want off-color material. Ask any entertainer who has been overseas. Many of them have heard complaints about off-color material and the complaints come from the GIs themselves. Sometimes they write home to their families and they don't hesitate to mention the names of performers who have presented offending material. Here's one rule to follow. If you wouldn't do it in your own home, before your parents, your younger brothers and sisters, then **DON'T DO IT. DON'T SAY IT.**

"Look, Vivian," Paul Welton said, when she swayed at the mike during rehearsal. "If you're feeling bad—"

"It's nothing. Just those damned shots."

"Well, if you're sure you're okay."

"I'll just sit on the stool for a while."

"Keep that in," Bob B. Downs said, coming down the aisle holding his own, recently punctured arm. "I know now why you fellows don't want to go home," he would say later, in dozens of far-flung places, to a chorus of denial. "That's where all those sadistic nurses with the ten-foot needles hang out."

He liked it. She sat on the tall stool, one foot on a rung, long leg extending through a slit in the silver lamé.

"Now you take these nurses around here," he would say. "Lovely girls, every one of them. Not a needle anywhere. Just bedpans that they put into a deep freeze before serving."

TRAVEL LIGHT. In most cases your overseas baggage allowance is limited to 55 pounds. Above this you are allowed only enough weight to cover necessary musical instruments and props. You cannot carry additional weight in shoulder bags, oversize purses, or handbags. The only personal allowance over the 55 pounds is a purse of normal size, a book, and a coat.

Fifty-five pounds is not a lot, but you will have everything you need if you pack judiciously. Here is the best advice we can give you:

The Post Exchanges (PX's) are located all over the world, wherever our troops are. You are given the privilege of purchasing articles from them. Lest there be any misunderstanding, we repeat that you will have to **PURCHASE** the articles. The PX's supply **NEEDS** and not **LUXURIES**. If you are particular and feel you can use only a certain type of cold cream or powder—**TAKE IT WITH YOU**.

At the PX you can buy cigarettes, cigars, candy, magazines, writing paper, ink, pens, pencils, women's personal necessities, talcum powder, towels, washcloths, soap, combs, handkerchiefs, all men's toiletries, underwear, socks, ties, razor blades, toothpaste, and toothbrushes.

For women, the most important baggage is your stage wardrobe. A GI doesn't want to see you in slacks and he's not interested in your uniform, no matter how proud you are of it. He wants to see you look like the girls back home on an important Saturday night date. Remember that, and take your best clothes with you. And never wear your uniform on stage. Take only es-

entials, but take plenty of them. Some of the articles we list may not seem important now but when you're overseas and away from the Five and Ten you'll be glad you took them. Returning performers say there have been times when they'd have paid \$5 for a bobby pin. And the PX, obliging as it is, cannot stock beauty items and costume accessories in expectation of a visit from a girl performer.

Artificial flowers for your hair could be considered good baggage. Edith Delaney, the tap dancer, always gets a big hand when she finishes her act and tosses out the flowers from her hair.

Bobby pins, nail polish, cosmetics. Cold cream, because there may be times when you can't find water to wash in. Perfume, soap, a pair of sunglasses. Face powder and talcum and an extra hair brush. Facial tissue. GI's don't often bleach their hair, so if you need a bleaching agent, take it with you. Vitamin pills might come in handy. A sewing kit. A good mirror, a traveling iron that works and a long cord to go with it. Even field units can generate electricity, but the plug might be a long way from your tent.

You'll have your uniform and your stage wardrobe. If you have room, take a couple of suits and two blouses. Cotton is good for warm climates and is light in weight and easily washed. There will be no dry cleaners within quite a few miles of the front. Shoes! A good, comfortable sports shoe can make you think it's going to save your life. Nylons? If you're lucky enough to have them, take them. Take all you have. Some climates take days to dry a pair of hose.

"We flew up here in a army bomber," Bob B. Downs told the first audience, Seabees and sailors and construction workers and airmen and soldiers at Kodiak. "The crew was real nice to us. I lit up a cigarette and then I asked one of the boys if it was all right. About that time an engine gave a little cough and he looked at me just as calm as you please and said, 'Don't worry, if anything happens the ocean will put it out for you.'"

The transition from balmy May in southern California to the Alaskan peninsula brought out a post-injection

fever in Vivia. She was a mixture of ice and fire as she swept regally out.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Bob B. Downs said, "Miss Vivia Wilder."

Welton gave a quick downbeat. It began with an upswell of saxes and clarinets and grew until, like the sun rising over a quiet lake, there was Vivia, head lifted, fever forgotten, living as she could live only with that vibrant beat around her. *"Will I ever find, the boy in my life, the one who is my ideal?"*

"Oh, God, baby, here I am."

Cheers. And the band soaring to drop and leave that big, throaty voice pouring out past the assembled faces to the cold water and over the mounds of materials and "You, sailor, where are you from?"

Proudly. "Knoxville, Tennessee."

"And you admit it?"

Hoots, roars. Bob B. Downs rolling up his pants legs to show skinny shanks, dancing prissily out to a roll of laughter and a puzzled look from Vivia.

"Well," he said, leaning in toward Vivia's mike, "if she's gonna steal my thunder and do comedy lines I'll show her I got good legs, too."

Men clapping along, shouting out in untrained voices, Vivia cheerleading, voice amplified over, *"You will shout when it hits you, yes indeed."*

"You want some more of that?" Bob B. Downs, leading the applause.

Cheers, whoops.

"Okay, you got it. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Vivia Wilder."

FOUR

WHEN she went to sleep after the eleven-to-seven it wasn't there, and when she woke up and had breakfast-lunch it was. Huge and hulking, in the drab color of war, she was rusty in places and in place the camouflage paint was peeling. Marcie had seen her too, and by the time Liz was dressed Marcie was full of curiosity. She

had no name, just a navy number, and she looked as though she'd once been a proud ocean liner.

When they walked down to the docks the rails began to be lined with heads, as if by magic.

"I tell you, Sarge," a voice called out, "they ain't Eskimoes."

Liz looked up and laughed.

"Throw a kiss to the fighting 7th Infantry," someone called.

"Knock that off."

"Hell, Sarge, them officers and gentlemen ain't no Jap spies."

The rusting hull towered up, young faces, some with helmets, some not.

"When's sick call, sir?"

"Oh, I've got me a terrible tummyache."

"I'll send up an A.P.C.," Liz called, smiling. They were the ones. She knew it was time. Mark had disappeared without a word and E.O. and the boys, the corpsmen, had been pulled out for an unknown destination two days previously. She wondered whether it would be Kiska—Little Kitten, as the Russians called it—or Attu. She felt the wind pouring down from Mount Ballyhoo. Still quite chilly.

"You fellows gonna get to come ashore?" Marcie asked.

"Sarge," someone wailed, "we've been invited nicely."

But they were not to be allowed ashore.

"Good luck," she called. She didn't see the big sea-planes, three of them, coming down from the north, picking landing areas amid the crowded, seemingly haphazard array of boats, ships, planes in the harbor. She felt like weeping for them. Back in the lounge, remembering how she and the other nurses had worked with the corpsmen, teaching them better bandaging techniques, how to stop arterial bleeding, everything they could, she felt a little better.

"There are a couple of army field hospitals out there," Ethel said. "And the boys will be there. They'll take care of them."

"They'd better," Liz said, for she knew she'd be seeing some of them. She wouldn't remember the faces, but she might be seeing some of the very men who leaned over the rail and teased them in such high spirits.

Out on the harbor small boats converged around the

three newly arrived flying boats. Sunlight gleamed on brass. A girl with blond hair flying in the stiff wind gasped as spray caught her in the face. The boats moved toward the shore. A trumpet player sounded the charge. The men on the transport caught sight of the blond and began to cheer. The cold wind whipped Vivia's skirt as she climbed onto the dock, quite near the crowded transport. She flushed as leg was exposed and a wild cheer issued from a couple of hundred throats.

"Encore, encore," a man yelled.

Word passed swiftly. Soon the transport's deck was covered, men jockeying for position along the multilevel decks. Bob B. was not yet on the scene. Paul Welton conferred with the harbormaster and came back shaking his head.

"We're a little late," he said. "They're shoving off within the hour."

"Sing to me, baby," a youthful dogface yelled from the lower deck. "Give us a show."

"Paul, we can set up on the dock," Vivia said.

He nodded. The harbormaster rounded up a few Seabees. Soon there was electricity. Vivia was in her uniform. She tapped the mike.

"Yeah, yeah, we can hear you," someone on the crowded ship yelled.

"Sorry about the uniform, fellas," she said. "You all are in such a hurry to leave I didn't have time to change."

"Yeah, we hate it." A voice made itself heard. "Just take it off."

"Do you know the temperature out here?" she asked, blazing that smile up at them. "Have a heart."

"Mine's about a hundred and nine," someone called back.

"Paul, you wanta cool these fellas off?" she asked. He tapped his foot. The saxes began low. "American Patrol." Miller style. A Seabee yelled out in joy, leaped to his feet, started doing a quite creditable jitter-bug. Vivia, throwing her chin high in a glad little laugh, camel-walked toward him along the rough planks of the docks.

At first, Liz thought that E.O. must have found some records somewhere, and then she realized that the music was coming from outside. From the windows she saw the swirl of blond hair, the graceful legs, arm thrown high,

swivel-hipping around the grinning, jiving Seabee who held her hand. It couldn't be, but it was.

She went running down onto the docks, halting as the band started the repetitive, building, dynamic ending, Vivia swirling, legs flashing under the uniform skirt. It was something she would never forget, the huge, rusting ship, men everywhere, sitting in the lifeboats, clinging to deck members, climbing the stubby mast, lined several deep along the rail. And beyond it the flotilla of ships and boats that she'd watched grow day by day, the bay kicking up under the stiff, chill wind, whitecaps running in to splash against the side of the transport that was toward the open harbor.

"You, soldier, where are you from?" Her voice a trifle breathy after the dance.

"Nebraska."

"And you admit it?"

A bawling, wailing trumpet doing "Sugar Blues," the drummer and guitar man in a little battle, a comedy skit. The roar of powerful engines from the harbor sometimes drowning out the sound. Vivia sneaking away to shiver in a barren room in a warehouse, a Seabee on guard at the door, emerging with chill bumps on her bare shoulders in the silver lamé gown to be greeted with first a roar and then a reverent silence as her big, throaty voice rode the wind, amplified, ringing out over the chilly, whitecapped waters in song after cheered song until, shuffling, apologetic, the harbormaster pulled her to one side.

"Well, fellas," she said, "the boss man tells me you have to go. You mind if we just keep on singing and playing as long as we can see you?"

The roar of approval was her answer, and now Welton bounced into "In the Mood," clanking chains, the groan of released hawsers, the creak of the last gangway going up. Tugs chugged, moving the ship away from the dock. The distance grew, and Vivia whispered to the band-leader. No arrangement as yet, but the bass, guitar, and piano came in.

"*I'll be seeing you, in all the old familiar places,*" she sang, and the men began to sing with her, their voices coming back, breaking into a World War I fight song as the ship began to pick up steam to clear the harbor. Then and only then did she shiver and reach for a coat. And then there was Liz and she was giggling and

squeezing and saying, "Oh, Liz, hi, big sister," and wondering why Liz was weeping, although she was tearing up a bit herself, but probably just from the cold wind.

"Vivia," Liz said, "I am so very goddamned proud of you." For there were times when profanity added just that little bit of expression of which Liz was otherwise incapable. "But you're chilled to the bone. Come on and we'll get you a cup of hot coffee."

"Damnit, Liz," she said, "do you think we'd lose this war if I didn't drink coffee?"

FIVE

E.O. GARDNER made his first amphibious landing under combat conditions on May 11, 1943, going in with the second wave of 7th Infantry assault troops. There were casualties waiting for the corpsmen on the beach and he didn't see any actual fighting. He spent his time moving the wounded to the army field hospital that had come in with the second wave. He proudly told his buddies that they'd had better training than the army guys.

E.O.'s speciality was fixing plaster. He was a whizz kid at it, could immobilize a broken bone with a skill that brought admiring comments from the army doctors. After the initial impact he didn't have time to be shocked. Some wounds were worse than others and each man needed the quickest care, and that was what he was there for. When the weather moved in, making visibility almost impossible, he worried a little about getting lost and stumbling into Jap lines, but it didn't happen. One day became the next and May moved along with the division fighting both Japs and the worst weather conditions imaginable, moving inland to meet the last Jap suicide attack in a place called Chicagof Valley.

Back at the Dutch Harbor hospital the casualties started arriving. The ones who could be moved were the lucky ones, finding warmth and clean sheets. They came in with lungs punctured, heads bloodied, eyes missing, arms and legs gone, shrapnel in every part of the body, suffering from shock, from the cold, from fractured legs

and backs and arms. Now the months of little work seemed like a dream as the nurses fell to and began to do the job for which they were trained and paid.

Camp Show unit 334 had come and gone, leaving Dutch Harbor in PBY's, transferring to land-based bombers up at Kodiak, going Liz knew not where, but leaving her with a warm glow, grateful to the fates of war that had brought a quick and happy reunion with Vivia. She'd been astounded by the maturity her sister had shown. She'd make it. If anyone ever made it, it would be Vivian Ruth (Vivia) Wilder. God help anyone who tried to stand in Vivia's way. Liz used the pleasant memory of those few hours with Vivia as a support as the wards filled.

E.O. and the corpsmen came home, one of them with his arm in a sling, having taken a Jap .25 machine-gun bullet just through the lower flesh of the forearm. He refused to leave his post, said he could do more with one hand than those army guys down on Attu could do with two. E.O. was thinner, red-eyed, but he walked with more assurance. He went to work without sleep the same day he returned, on the eleven-to-seven. Occasionally he'd weave a bit, out on his feet. After that it was a bit easier.

Some of the wounded had been in the cold water and suffered the effects, including gangrene. And there was still Kiska to be taken.

One by one the casualties were shipped out on heated planes that would take them to hospitals in the United States. Many of them were there for only hours. Mark came back too, and Liz had a quiet afternoon with him. She asked him if Attu were as bad as the Canal.

"An interesting question," he mused. "Is it better to die sweaty or chilled?"

"Sorry," she said. "If you don't want to talk about it—"

"No, I don't mind, except, damnit, Liz, there's just nothing to say. Our young men killed more of their young men than they killed of our young men and the circle shall ever be unbroken."

"You men," she said. "Why don't you want to talk about it? My God, if a woman went into combat she'd be full of every detail. All you men want to do is tell lies about how scared you were and make jokes."

"Liz, I've tried to say it. It comes out empty. Maybe

someday someone will be able to put it into words. The fellow who wrote *All Quiet on the Western Front* came close. Hemingway almost made it, writing about Spain. And Stephen Crane." He lit a Camel, let the smoke travel unnoticed up his still sun-browned face. "I ran into a rifleman in New Guinea. Hargis Westerfield. Between patrols he was trying to put it into words, and he came pretty close too. If he ever publishes I'll give you a copy. I remember a part of one thing, a blank-verse thing. Three GI's are in a slit trench, he called it a death-cell. He'd been through a night fire fight and when it was light there was only one man left, besides him. But there were three Japs dead, little dead assassins, he called them.

"It's a private thing, I guess," he said. "It centers on small incidents, little hurts. An infected mosquito bite can be more annoying than a bullet wound, because you don't get sent out to a clean, white hospital with an infected mosquito bite. You can relate to one death, the death of a buddy, a friend. That boy, Billy Gene Carnes, stands out in my memory more vividly than all the other Marine dead on the ridge. You might ask E.O. how he felt when he had to help clean up in the valley on Attu."

"Oh, he's the strong, silent type too."

"They died gloriously for the emperor," he said. "But a little messily for those who had to clean it up. After the banzai charge failed, those who were still alive blew themselves up with grenades. The GI's had to clear a road, pushing the bodies and pieces of bodies off to the side with big cats. I saw more than one of them pull off to the side and puke. How can a man believe that? Hands, feet, legs, severed heads, guts, tissue, blood, sinew, fingers, toes, ankles, a torso looking like a pasty yellow piece of ancient broken sculpture."

"I guess you'd better stop," Liz said, a little white-faced.

And then he too was gone. And the winds blew. Kiska was next. And there was a renewal of the old tension, a knowledge that soon they'd be coming in again with their soft, human flesh torn in every conceivable way. E.O. and the corpsmen were off again, this time to practically build with their own hands a dispensary down the chain of islands, and Chief Nurse Ethel Johnston came into Liz's room to say she was off in a PBY to make a tour of inspection.

"You're in charge, Lieutenant J.G.," she said, with a little smile.

At first Liz didn't catch it. Then Ethel was handing her the new insignia. "Sew it on, girl."

Marcie had found a cake. The nurses gathered in Liz's room and congratulated her, got their share of the cake, kidded her about being an old fussbudget, just like Chief Nurse Johnston. In the midst of the party the wind hit the side of the quarters like a closed fist, rising from a light breeze to a raging summer storm with a suddenness that silenced the girls' song.

PBY's and patrol boats searched the sea lanes over which the PBY carrying Ethel Johnson had been flying. When there was no longer any hope, it was the lieutenant (J.G., NC) who went into Ethel's room to gather her personal effects to be sent home to her mother in Davenport, Iowa.

Anyone who cared to look would have seen it. In nurses whites, new insignia of rank proudly displayed, she went in, head high, determined to get the sad chore over quickly. And then she saw Douglas.

And as she sat there in Ethel's rocking chair, the silly stuffed monkey clutched in her arms, soft fur offering a strange, foolish comfort, she thought of a nurse named Lucy Anne, and of Ethel. She made them a promise to take good care of old Douglas. In the days ahead Douglas would do his share to keep up the morale of those who cared for the wounded, and who kept up *their* morale.

August. A laughing, happy group of corpsmen. No long faces, no wounds, no red-bleared eyes, no staggering sleeplessness. And plenty of talk.

"They just weren't there," E.O. Gardner crowed. "Now you believe it if you can and don't ask me how they got off with the whole northern force navy out there, but they ran. We got men on Kiska now and the Seabees are already building airstrips for the Forts to bomb the Kurils. They bugged out."

It was not until later that the nurses at Dutch Harbor learned the frightening, ironic truth. The assault on the Little Kitten, Kiska Island, had been made in a peasoup fog and, in the mixup, the first unit to be landed on the dismal, barren shore had been the army field hospital

to which E.O. and the Dutch Harbor corpsmen had been attached.

E.O. went a little white when he heard it from a grizzled army doctor who was questioning the ancestry of those who had planned that snafu.

"Rejoice, Marines and army," E.O. crowed. "Your work is done. From now on, all invasions will be handled by the navy corpsmen."

And once again they were in the backwater of the war. Men in the metalworking shops along the docks made a plaque to commemorate Chief Nurse Ethel Johnston and it was placed over the door of the hospital, which was, once again, more often empty than not. Mark's letters were being headed "somewhere in the Pacific." Vivia's one letter had the same designation and was so brief and so uninformative that the censors hadn't even touched it. Liz's own letters to her Chief Medical Officer were identical, time after time. She was respectfully requesting transfer, preferably to one of the new, gleaming white hospital ships beginning to join the fleet in the warmer and more active portions of the world's greatest ocean.

SIX

JOHN Wilder followed the progress of the war on a large map of the world that he'd had mounted on cardboard and hung on a living room wall. At first Elizabeth complained. It didn't do much for the decor, and it detracted from the two hand-tinted pictures over the little writing desk—Liz and Vivia at the time of their high school graduation. Later it became sort of fun for her to have John point out a place on the map, to look at the vast spread of the Pacific Ocean and wonder just which dot represented the point of land nearest to where Liz was at the moment, or Vivia, or Mark.

The United States had emerged with a vengeance from its pre-war isolation. Young American men from Lamar, Arkansas, and Whodathotit, Texas, and Cold Finger, Montana, were covering global distances that made the travels of Marco Polo look like nothing. American ship-

yards were putting the techniques of Henry Ford to work, turning out ships at an incredible pace, even faster than the German submarine packs in the Atlantic could sink them. Those ships braved the submarines, the weather, and land-based German bombers to penetrate into the frigid Barents Sea to bring war materials into Russia through the back door at Archangel and Murmansk. The Air Corps was in the British Isles and American infantry and armor were in combat in the deserts of North Africa.

With the landings near Algiers and Oran in November of 1942, attention had seemed to shift from the Pacific, where the Americans received their first body blow, to the German fronts. At the Kasserine Pass, Rommel once again showed his military genius, handing American forces one of their more bloody defeats. Slowly, an old army career officer named George Patton began to make his share of news. He was a big, beefy grim-faced, unsmiling man who wore old-fashioned puffed-leg cavalry britches and two white-handled revolvers.

John Wilder didn't particularly like movies, but he and his wife went to see the newsreels. Much was being made of the air war against Germany, the RAF by night, the USAAC by day, and the very good quality film showed huge formations of B-17's lumbering through clouds of antiaircraft fire. What looked like enough bombs to destroy the entire world dropped from the open bomb bays and then, below, the ground would shudder and Elizabeth would take his hand and cling tightly.

A B-17 was a hero. The *Memphis Belle* was the first fort to complete twenty-five bombing missions over occupied Europe and survive. She was feted in newsreels and War Department propaganda films. Wing cameras in American fighters, sleek P-51's and the stubby, long-range P-47 Thunderbolts, showed lances of fire seeking out a dodging, desperate ME-109 or a Focke-Wulf 190 that then converged with the stream of tracers and smoked, disintegrated, or blossomed into flame. The theater audience would then cheer. Only a few, John Wilder among them, had the disturbing realization that the destroyed object was more than a machine. They had all just watched a man die.

Although the War Department did not release exact figures, upward of twelve million Americans, men and

women, were in uniform. Other millions worked at war-related jobs. There were no new automobiles being built, and you prayed that old Galloping Gertrude would live through the war and that there wouldn't be a shortage of spare parts.

Aircraft on training missions flew over the bay, B-24's, sleek, gull-winged F-4U's. Ships appeared and disappeared, clearly visible down there, like toys on the blue water, diminishing as they headed through the Golden Gate to the Pacific. The city was always mobbed with men in uniform, and when he drove, John always picked up hitchhikers, meeting boys from all over the country. He didn't have a boy in the service, but he had two girls, and at least once a week he'd find an excuse to meet some sailor or Marine or soldier or airman and invite him to dinner. Elizabeth would fuss about happily and make the meat rations stretch and ask the boy if he'd ever met her daughter, who was a navy nurse.

Almost everyone was, in some way, connected with a man or a woman in the service. In store windows where the owners had sons, husbands, fathers in the Pacific, in the Air Corps in England, in North Africa, the gold stars began to appear. Western Union took a special place during those summer days of 1943 when the messenger boys were busy in every part of the United States, bringing that dread envelope from the War Department.

John and Elizabeth's neighbors, Mary and Sam Levine, walked to the neighborhood theater one evening with them, sat and laughed at a cartoon comedy in which Russian gremlins bugged Nazi bad guys, and sat up straighter when the familiar fanfare brought on the newsreel. Big, professional announcer's voice: "American B-17 Flying Fortresses continue to rain ruin on the Nazi war machine in Europe." Shots of the Forts taking off, huge array of the big, lumbering planes in the air, beautifully clear and detailed pictures.

Sammy Levine, Mary and Sam's oldest boy, had managed, despite censorship, to let his father and mother know that the pilot of the Fort on which he was a tail gunner was also from San Francisco and that they named their ship *Golden Gate Gertie*.

Now, as the announcer told of a heavy raid into the Ruhr Valley, there was the *Gertie*, flying smoothly in formation, featured in a close-up so that Sam leaped to

his feet and yelled, "Hey, that's my boy's plane." The audience cheered. Black puffs of flak began to appear. The scene shifted to the interior of a Fort, tinny, excited voices—not scared, mind you, excited, like young men on a duck shoot. "Bogie, eleven-o'clock high. He's coming in. Get him, Pete. Get him." Cheers, and a German fighter peeling off, smoke a wisp, then a rush, then flames and a spreading explosion, a Fort flying through the very edge of it, plowing onward.

"And although the huge raids are not accomplished without loss," the newsreel announcer saying, "the heavily armed Forts are taking their toll not only of German industrial capacity, but of the waning German air strength." Another 109 blossomed, and then there was *Golden Gate Gertie*, bomb-bay door opening and then a puff and the plane shuddered, portside wing peeling back, folding, the ship falling, beginning to cartwheel. No doubt about it, for, before she began to fall, the camera was close enough to show the outline of the pinup girl, the words *Golden Gate Gertie*.

Mary Levine started to scream and she was still screaming when they carried her out. The telegram came a full week later: "We regret to inform you that your son, Corporal Samuel L. Levine, is missing in action and presumed dead in the line of duty with the USAAC over Germany."

"Well, Elizabeth," John said sadly, when they were at home, "I guess someone goofed. It's understandable. Tragic, in this case, but understandable. They're all doing the best they can."

Because he had two daughters and a good friend somewhere in the Pacific, John Wilder turned to the Pacific theater news first each morning. In March of that year the War Department had lifted secrecy enough to let the country know that the navy had socked it to the Japs in the Bismarck Sea, knocking hell out of an invasion force that was carrying seven thousand fresh troops from Rabaul to New Guinea. The strategy of the war in the Pacific was becoming clear. It was to be an amphibious war, and every man who served there had a landing craft and a beach in his future. Progress was slow, but encouraging.

Elizabeth laughed one night after seeing John bring her up-to-date on the big map. "Vella Lavella sounds

like a good name for a stripteaser," she said. The island had been taken by a combined force of army and Marines. Mark had filed a story about the operation. Elizabeth, although she was not as avid about the war news as her husband, always enjoyed Mark's stories. Sometimes he got a little grim, but his work was not all a catalog of death and fighting. He put in interesting little things about what the men did when they were not fighting. She went to see the newsreels only because she knew John enjoyed them. She knew men were dying, but she didn't like to see it. When the newsreel showed a Marine flame-thrower team working in a jungle, a small, scurrying Japanese soldier running out of a dugout, aflame from head to foot, she was almost physically sick. It was just too horrible. She knew such things had to be done, but it was so horrible. She spent a lot of time thinking of her daughters, and the man she hoped would someday be her son-in-law, praying for them, praying especially for Vivian, for she was so young and so inexperienced in the ways of the world.

Life on the homefront was mainly a life of waiting, waiting for news, waiting for a letter, dreading, the ring of the doorbell. The Hollywood studios were cranking out pictures designed to show that the American fighting man was the world's best, that every unit had a man from Brooklyn, that all the men thought about was getting home to Mom, old Towser, and a piece of apple pie. Jap casualties ran high in those films, and every Jap was an evil-looking, grinning, laughing villain who got his in the end. The music industry mobilized for war and juke boxes all over the world praised the Lord and passed the ammunition, knew the "G.I. Jive" blessed America at every public assembly. The smallest street urchin spoke the language, the sometimes poetic, strange language of the war. JU-88, ME-109, M-1 A-1, barracks commando, bazooka, Molotov cocktail, sad sack, Kilroy was here, Bougainville in the Solomons, swag men, camping beside a billabong, Anzak, panzer, banzai, GI, dogface, jarhead, OPA, OSS, Able-Baker-Charlie-Dog-Easy-Fox, combat fatigue, the gremlins will get you if you don't watch out. Ed Murrow broadcasting from England: "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special bulletin: Allied land, sea, and air forces have invaded the island of Sicily, it was announced just minutes ago

in Washington by the War Department. Beachheads are secure and American and British forces are moving inland in this, the first operation aimed directly at Fortress Europe."

SEVEN

PEARL Harbor, before December 7, 1941, was the navy's country club. Officers and their dependents fought, politicked, and engaged in various forms of connivery to be assigned to Pearl. By the summer of '43 the island was too crowded to be really pleasant, but it was tough all over. Even with the hundreds of thousands of troops that had poured into the Hawaiian bases, even with a war going on and the hospital ships bringing back the wounded from all over the Pacific, Pearl was better than San Diego or Guadalcanal or Camp Pendleton or March Field or Washington or immediate shipment to a fighting front. Hell, men were dying out there. They had died in the cold waters of the North Atlantic and in the air over occupied Europe and on islands ranging from frozen Attu to steamy Bougainville. For a dogface or a gyrene a triple-tier cot in a repo depot in Hawaii beat the hell out of a pup tent or a foxhole in the jungle. There was the sun, the unmatched beaches, booze, broads, the feeling of vitality in the bustle of Honolulu that made a man know he was still very much alive.

Most of the men who came to Hawaii first saw the islands as a darkness on the distant horizon. After a slow, waterborne approach, they saw the mountains begin to rise from the shore. Many of them went to advance training bases, the lucky ones getting leave to try a pass or two at the local wahines and the WACs and the nurses. Not many of them saw as much of the islands as Vivia was to see.

Vivia came in royal style, in a Mars Flying Clipper, being served coffee, ough, and snacks along the way. The big, lumbering bird came in low over a Pacific that appeared calm until one saw the white lines of surf below the jut of Diamond Head. Vivia loved it. The island looked like a huge green jewel. She felt as though she

were living a travelogue. Her excitement was shared by her seatmate, a bouncy, compact little brunette. Lynn Briefer was almost a full year short of Vivia's mature nineteen.

Of all the troupe, Lynn was Vivia's favorite, and the closest thing to a friend she'd been able to develop in the short time she'd been working with Bob B. Downs's group. Lynn was a Georgia girl, one of the dreamy ones who had left a fairly typical middle-class home to make it big in Hollywood. She counted herself the luckiest girl in the world to have landed a job with Downs's Camp Show troupe. Her compact little figure looked great in the dance costumes, with well-shaped calves and thighs that were very feminine but a bit large for a dancer and made her the target of admiring whistles and cheers. Her face was pretty but not spectacular, her dark hair thick and usually pulled back behind her well-shaped ears to frame the dark-brown eyes, the full, vibrantly painted lips, the graceful nose. High youthful breasts were emphasized by the costumes.

Lynn was one of the girls Paul Welton was using in an effort to put together a vocal group to help showcase Vivia's voice. Vivia had worked with Lynn on the long trip across the Pacific. Her voice was adequate. She could carry a tune and blend fairly well, but she couldn't read a note of music and had trouble remembering her part.

Vivia had promised Lynn that they would be roommates, so the younger girl was a bit disappointed to find that even in wartime Hawaii there was space enough for each to be assigned a private room in a BOQ. Vivia sallied forth from her room to do the first show, to do what she loved doing best, to sing in front of Paul Welton's band. Welton's exemplified the term "big band." It wasn't big merely because there were sixteen musicians, but because Welton believed in section work and not in solos, voicing the sections of four trumpets, four saxes doubling on clarinet, four trombones as individual units and working them together in a blend. Their tightness was matched only by the very professional bands of pre-war times: Dorsey, Goodman, Shaw, Miller, Basie, and Ellington. And Welton could showcase a singer as no other leader could do. Vivia wrapped herself in his music, submerged herself in it, complemented it, grew

with it into inspired performances that brought Welton to approach Bob B. Downs and ask for more time for Vivia during the show.

"Sure," Bob B. said, "give the kid another number." But as Welton walked away he called out. "Just remember, Paul, that this is the Bob B. Downs Show."

Vivia was oblivious to any potential for trouble between herself and Bob B. Downs. She thought he was a very funny man. It was the nature of servicemen to yell "girls, girls, girls" when Bob B. finished his monologue. And because she lived for her singing, it seemed only fitting that she was cheered, that she swept off the stage in that regal manner to thunderous approval, that she drew cheers when she blew a kiss and said, "Oh, Lord, how I love each and every one of you."

She was with Lynn when she made her first excursion into Honolulu. She fell in love with the exciting, vital city immediately. The dark mixture of Oriental races produced some beautiful women who received their share of whistles and wolf calls from servicemen on leave, but the two stateside girls, in swirly summer frocks, faces radiant with inner excitement, made all who saw them forget the exotic graces of the local wahines. The city seemed a great big, gaudy toy made especially for Vivia. She felt as if she owned it, as if, indeed, she owned the world. She bought a sarong just like Dorothy Lamour's and giggled with Lynn as she tried it on. She sent little gifts home to the folks. She was a ten-thousand-mile girl, experienced, mature. She'd traveled six thousand miles getting to the Aleutians and back, a few thousand by bus in the United States, three thousand or a little more, she wasn't quite sure, getting to Hawaii. And the whole Pacific was out there. No one knew how long they'd be in Hawaii. Like real soldiers, they were not consulted, just bundled into transport and shipped off.

"It's so nice to be here on O-ha-oo," she said to an audience of Marines.

"It's pronounced O-wah-hoo," Downs told her afterward.

"The announcer who broke into the regular show on December seventh said O-ha-oo," she countered.

"Don't be stupid all your life," Downs said. "And cut the ad libs. You're here to sing."

O-ha-oo, O-wah-hoo. What difference did it make? All

America was hearing names it had never heard before. The big deal about the pronunciation of the name reminded her of a sign E.O. had put on the bulletin board at graduation time: Yesterday I didn't even know what a high school graduate was and now I are one.

After the incident during which she'd jitter-bugged with the Seabee on the dock at Dutch Harbor she'd put it into the act. While Paul Welton bounced a good beat she encouraged men up front to get up and jive a little, and then she'd pick out one of them to come onstage to dance with her. She would reach down and give him a hand up and then go swirling around him, long legs flashing. It was always a big hit, especially if she were lucky enough to pick a shy one who blushed when she kissed him on the cheek at the end of the number.

On her third night in Hawaii she was awakened by the eerie wail of air raid sirens. She sprang out of bed and ran down the hall to Lynn's room, meeting her friend halfway, Lynn wide-eyed. They learned later from a navy officer that it had been a false alarm. A long-range reconnaissance aircraft returned to base ahead of schedule with engine trouble and the radio out.

"You were really scared," Lynn said.

"A little," she admitted. But not really. With everything coming her way, it was impossible to think of being killed by something as impersonal as a bomb, dropped from an airplane piloted by some little yellow man she'd never seen.

The Downs troupe was not like the first one. For example, she no longer had a bandful of self-appointed guardians as she'd had when she was with Rudy Blake. She was just a band singer, a girl who looked good and was, therefore, a legitimate target. However the musicians soon learned that Miss Vivia Wilder was not interested.

In fact, Miss Vivia didn't think about men much. She didn't even think of Terry Adams much anymore. She was not the same girl she'd been when she was tricked into a hotel bed. She was Vivia Wilder, singer. She enjoyed her outings to town and to the beaches, but she lived for her singing. Men were around her, necessary for carrying heavy baggage and for her music, but that was all. The men out front were loves, every one of them, but removed from her, distant, just faces. They made it possible for her to sweep onto the stage perched

atop stilt heels, throwing her long legs ahead of her in that purposeful stride, silver lamé gown glittering to highlight the pale hair, to stand with feet slightly apart in a businesslike stance and belt out a song after Bob B. Downs said, "Fellas, officers and men, ladies, and you slobs too, here's Miss Vivia Wilder."

Vivia and Lynn were a part of a small unit that went to do a show in a large naval hospital. Bob B. joked with the men, Vivia and Lynn danced, and Vivia sang with just guitar, bass, and drums set up in the recreation room. All available space was filled. The men were so sweet, so cheerful, she thought, and yet it was a little depressing to see them without legs and arms and with the most awful scars. She was pleased to return to the large, outdoor crowds where the men were vital and healthy.

The extended stay in Hawaii was being used to perfect the new show. Regulations stated that there must be a complete advance script for every part of the show and Bob B., an ad-lib artist who thought himself at least the equal of Bob Hope, had some steamy sessions with brass and Camp Show people. As for the music, Welton soon discovered that the boys wanted to hear familiar things, and when Vivia sang they wanted mostly romantic songs. He spent hours going over arrangements with Vivia, perfecting every minute bit of it, urging the vocal group into being better than they actually were.

Vivia would have preferred to sing alone, but she was pleased when Welton said, "Your voice is so strong, so distinctive, that it dominates the group, gives the whole thing the flavor of you. There's only one other singer I can say that about, and that's Jo Stafford."

It was high praise indeed to be compared to that peerless, pure, bell-like voice. And she began to enjoy it when Lynn and the others, another dance girl and two men from the band, blended in behind her and filled the entire sky with the smooth, pure sounds.

Sailors poured off a huge, deadly looking aircraft carrier to see the show. They performed in the open, the stage the bed of a big trailer, ships in the background, now and then a plane buzzing by overhead. It was the finished show, approved by both military brass and the Camp Show officials, and it went well, Bob B. getting huge laughs, Vivia using her one joke, the where-are-you-from gimmick, Bob B. pretending to be jealous of the

laughter, prancing out with his pants legs pulled up. Welton had added a Latin number to provide Vivia with some swaying material and her dance, between choruses, brought a roar of approval.

It was a perfect day, cloudless save for decorative, white, cumulus clouds, her voice coming easy and strong. She was sorry it was over when she headed for her mobile dressing room. When she saw an officer making a definite attempt to head her off she lengthened her stride and ignored him. It was not the first time an officer or enlisted man had sought a word with Vivia. She was usually polite but distant. That day, however, was too perfect to be spoiled by having to ward off an invitation. It was not against regulations to socialize with the men, but Vivia had decided that the least complicated way was to forego any social contact, except when she was with a group of performers. She was not condemned for that attitude.

The officer broke into a run and caught up with her as she started to mount the steps into the dressing room. She turned to face him. He was tall, well over six feet, a nice-looking man.

"Miss Wilder, sorry to bother you," he said.

"I am in a hurry."

"I'm Jeff Walters, Admiral Partier's staff."

He was a lieutenant commander, and young for the rank. She had never heard of Admiral Partier, but that meant little. There were lots of admirals she'd never heard of.

"I'm here at the request of the admiral," Walters said. "I apologize for keeping you. I know you must be tired after such a terrific performance."

"Yes," she said.

"The admiral extends his congratulations and appreciation for the show, and asks that you join him for dinner at the senior officers' mess."

"Gee," she said, quickly casting about for some excuse.

"Please," he said. "I'm not thinking of the admiral now. I'll be there, and looking at you through dinner would be a pleasure."

She smiled in spite of herself. He'd said it so nicely.

"There's this too," he said, with an engaging grin. "Admiral Partier sets a fine table. Best food and oldest wine on the island."

"You tempt me, after messhall chow," she said. "But I have to wash my hair."

"We all have to make our little sacrifices in wartime," he said. "Miss Wilder, have mercy. I've been *ordered* to deliver you. If I don't, it's my neck. You wouldn't want the admiral to chew me up and spit me out, would you?"

"Well," she said, "I guess we can't allow that to happen."

"I'll pick you up at your quarters at seven."

"Oh? Do you know where I'm staying?"

"Honey, it's my business to know everything. The admiral demands it." He touched the visor of his cap. "See you at seven. It's a small, informal gathering, but dressy. Okay?"

He came for her in a gleaming new Chevrolet staff car with the flag of a two-star admiral, a driver in a dress uniform, and a bouquet of exotic flowers. She allowed him to take her hand to help her in, and then the car moved smoothly across the base, halting in front of a small, pretty building with millions of blooms framing it against the side of a green hill.

She had chosen her basic black dress, and it made her look slim and sophisticated with its mesh top showing a creaminess of neck and upper chest. A black mess boy took her wrap. Lieutenant Commander Walters gave her his arm and they entered a large room where there was a small band playing, rhythm, piano, two saxes, a trumpet. The horn wasn't half bad as he did a little flowing run in the middle of "The Way You Look Tonight." There was a bar, gay garlands of island flowers everywhere, a few tables, a small dance floor. A handsome middle-aged couple, the officer in whites, the woman in a flowing evening gown, were dancing. Vivian saw four or five other women, mostly of her mother's age or older. Most of the men were of higher rank than Jeff Walters. He led her to the bar, toward a tall, smiling man who broke off his conversation and beamed at her.

"I feel rather sinfully selfish," Admiral Partier said, taking Vivian's hand. "Sinful to take you away from the men like this." He smiled. "But we must remember that officers are people too. We too need our morale boosted. Thank you for coming, Miss Wilder."

He was not at all what she expected in an admiral. Uniform aside, he looked a lot like a lawyer who came

to visit her father. His hair was just beginning to show a hint of white at the temples. His face was nicely formed, youthful, though the skin had a rugged, outdoor look. He had nice teeth, obviously his own, and a charming smile. She gave him that blazing smile of hers. It caused his eyes to narrow and twinkle in pleasure.

"Good job, Jeff," he said. "Now you run along. I'm too old to be in competition with a handsome young man like you."

A smiling black mess boy came hurrying toward them. "Josh here makes the best pineapple punch in the islands. I recommend it, but in small quantities. It tends to be almost lethal."

"That sounds swell," Vivia said. The drink came quickly. It was, as advertised, delicious, and the under-bite warned her to go easy.

"I saw the show today," Admiral Partier said. "I envy all the men who will have the pleasure of seeing you as you go out on your tour. And I can't tell you how much we, all of us, appreciate what you U.S.O. folks are doing. There's no way one can overrate the value of bringing a little touch of home to the men who are doing the fighting."

"I'm proud to be a part of it, sir," she said.

Looking around, she saw one-star admirals, full captains, commanders. It was distinguished company. It made her feel very young and a little nervous, but she told herself to pretend she was back home at the country club, in the company of judges, the senator when he was at home, doctors, lawyers, and businessmen who earned much more money than even a two-star admiral. Yet it was different. There was a quiet sense of strength about the admiral. She tried to guess at his command. How many men were under him? Over how many men did he hold the power of life and death?

He put her at ease by talking about her home. He knew the city. His voice was, she decided, of midwestern origin, but polished to that nonaccent stage developed by the best radio announcers and news commentators. She guessed, he was not yet fifty. Her father was fifty, but the admiral was so much more vital, so much younger. She wanted to ask, but did not.

Dinner was a whole small pig. It looked a little disgusting, snout and all, but was delicious. The side dishes

were delightful, some of them unfamiliar. Vivian ate with a youthful gusto that brought a smile to Partier's lips. She sat to the admiral's right. To her right was a buxom, motherly woman who talked about her son in the Air Corps. Important, powerful men spoke to her across the table, asked questions, praised her singing.

Over an after-dinner wine Partier leaned toward her. "I don't want you to think that I invited you merely to have entertainment."

"But that's what I do," she said, anticipating his request. "I'd love to."

"Wonderful."

The band was pro, and although it was impromptu they made a creditable showing as she picked her numbers, starting off with "Moonlight in Vermont," the trumpet doodling behind her. She sang four songs and then figured it was time to call a halt, did one encore, and went back to the table to sincere applause. She'd read things right, however, for shortly afterward people began to leave, the table was abandoned, and she sat at a table with Partier and a Marine colonel, sipping one of Josh's pineapple punches. It had been, she decided, a nice evening. She could become accustomed to this, to the luxury, to being anticipated by a smiling serving man, to the easy air of confidence about the men, to the feeling of being a part of something bigger than she. The men rolled off the romantic names of islands, places scattered all over the vast Pacific, with knowledgeable ease. They talked of vast operations, overall strategy—not letting any secret information out, of course. She was sorry when it was over and she was being escorted home in the staff car by Jeff Walters.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"The admiral?" He offered a cigarette, which she refused. "Nominally, he's in command of all naval facilities in the islands. But he's more than that. He's what they call a rising star. He'll be a member of the Joint Chiefs before the war's over."

"Big stuff, huh?" she asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact. He had his say about the overall plans for a Pacific campaign, and they listened to him in a lot of cases. Some say his is the best strategic mind in the navy. I agree."

"You sound like a fan."

"I am. There's not a man in the navy I'd rather serve under, for several reasons. I don't suppose you're interested in that, though."

"Tell me," she said.

"Well, for one thing, being on his staff puts me right in the middle of it. I'm privy to all the details of the big, overall scene. I feel that I'm doing my part even though I'm not on a combat ship. Another purely selfish reason is that, with Partier, I have a better chance for advancement than I'd have if I were in a combat command. I admit that I'm ambitious. I want to come out of this war at least a captain."

"Are you regular navy?"

"Not a chance," he said. "Annapolis, yes. But my post-war ambitions are elsewhere."

"You're from California. A native," she said, putting her old accent-spotting hobby to work.

"Los Angeles."

"And will you go back there after the war?"

"For a while. Then Sacramento, then Washington."

"Oh?"

He grinned at her. "Handsome war hero in politics. Should get a lot of votes if I have a good war record."

"Isn't that being a little cynical?"

"Maybe," he admitted. "But it's going to be a different ball game after the war. F.D.R. pulled us out of a depression into a war and there's going to be one hell of a lot of adjustments to make later on. I'm idealistic enough to think that I can contribute, and egotistical enough to think I'm a better man than ninety-nine percent of the clowns we have in politics."

"Well, good luck," she said.

"I want to thank you for coming tonight. It meant a lot to all of us. To the admiral, especially. The old boy needed some cheering up."

"Why is that?"

"He lost his wife during the December seventh attack," Jeff said. "And then his son, just a couple of weeks ago."

"Gee, that's awful." She wondered how he'd had the courage to be so charming tonight. "How did his son die?"

"In a royal lashup, a snafu, a foulup."

"He must have been just a kid," she said.

"He was a shavetail in the 2nd Marine Raiders. Got left on Makin."

"He doesn't look that old," she said. "To have a son, I mean, a son as old, old enough to be a lieutenant."

He examined her face in the dim moonlight glowing into the backseat of the slowly moving car. "He's forty-seven."

"Oh," she said. It seemed so old, forty-seven, and yet he didn't act like an old man. "Tell me about his son."

"Some of it hasn't been released," he said. He shrugged. "You heard about the Makin raid?"

"I really don't understand most of the war news," she said.

"It's in the Gilberts. A dinky little atoll. Carlson's Raiders were sent in on two big subs to shake the Japs up. Two companies went in, in rubber boats. They had been told to expect about two hundred and fifty Japs on Makin, and at first it seemed there were more. There was a lot of thunder, with one of the subs sinking two ships in the lagoon, an air raid, seaplanes trying to land Jap reinforcements. The Japs launched three counter attacks during the afternoon and did it so well that Carlson thought he was badly outnumbered. He decided it was time to get the hell out of there and then they had trouble with the outboard motors on the rubber boats. At midnight he told his men that it was their choice, stay on the beach or try to swim for the subs. He was ready to surrender by daylight. He sent out an officer to parlay with the Japs, but there were no live Japs left on the island to surrender to."

"Gee, I've always heard about what a hero Carlson is," Vivia said.

"Hell, I'm not saying he isn't. He's a damned good man. It's just that no one can believe the confusion and disorientation you can encounter under combat conditions. It was understandable, his mixup, and in spite of it the raid was a success. But that wasn't the last of it. They blew up the Jap installations on the island and then the subs came into the lagoon to pick them up. In their hurry to get out of there before the Japs could land more men, they left some behind. The admiral's son was one of them."

"Well, maybe he isn't dead," Vivia said. "Maybe he was just captured."

"He was captured; all right," Jeff said, his voice grim. "And then the Japs beheaded him, him and all the others left behind."

"Oh," she breathed, thinking of that gentle, quiet, polite man.

"So that's why I give you my personal thanks for being nice to him," Jeff said. "He's a fine man, Vivian, a good man, and a good officer." He laughed. "By the way, there's a houseparty this weekend at his place up on the hills. If you could see your way clear to come. . . ."

"Gee, I don't know," she said.

"Don't get the wrong idea. The admiral is a gentleman of the old school. Plenty of female chaperones around. Safe as houses, as the Limeys used to say before the blitz. You'd enjoy it. Swimming pool, a fine beach, good food and drink, good company if you can stand stodgy navy officers and maybe a politician or two."

"I'd have to check our schedule," she said.

"Would you? Look, I'll check back with you. Bring a bathing suit and something light for the sun. Tennis if you dig it."

"If I should decide to come, could I bring a friend?"

"A female friend?"

"Lynn, Lynn Briefer. She's the cute little brunette who is in the vocal group and dances."

"She'd be a welcome addition," he said.

Lynn was interested. "Man, I'd like to see how the other half lives," she said. And so it was decided. There was a show on Saturday afternoon and then, with a few things packed in one case, a ride off the base, through the city, up a winding road and along the shore.

Coquina rock gates, a wrought-iron sign that spelled out Partier. Jeff explaining, "Mrs. Partier was old Hawaii, missionary stock, but someone in the family reformed and went into the pineapple business. Big money. Was to go to young Bill, the admiral's son. All his now." Up a winding drive between tailored lines of palms and lush flowers, a huge, white, airy house. "The old home place. The admiral and his wife fixed it up. He spent a tour here before the war, and when he went to Washington, she stayed. She was at Pearl helping with a benefit for enlisted men's wives on Sunday when the Japs came."

A Rolls shared a parking area with Chevy staff cars and a shiny convertible. A white-coated houseboy, small,

darkly Oriental, escorted Vivia and Lynn to an upstairs room with two full-sized beds. A wide, open window looked down on a garden of exquisite beauty, an oval swimming pool. Several people were in the water, or sunning on the cement and grass margin. On a tennis court, Admiral Partier was engaged in active contest with a much younger man. He was holding his own. Beyond the gardens a steep cliff fell to a rocky shoreline where a tiny crescent of sandy beach was receiving the mild poundings of a surf.

They dressed in almost identical outfits, white pleated shorts, simple blouses. Vivia, with a smile of memory, put a flower behind her ear and thought of old E.O. and the time she'd started the feather fad in high school. With a tiny feeling of guilt, she reminded herself to answer E.O.'s last letter. And then they were walking onto plush lawn, Jeff introducing them around. The houseboy was extending cool glasses filled with a fine rum punch.

Partier finished his game, came toward Vivia, wiping his brow and his hair with a towel, racquet under his arm. In shorts and pullover shirt he showed a youngish physique.

"So nice of you to come," he said, bending to plant a light, dry kiss on Vivia's cheek. "And this must be Lynn."

Lynn smiled and extended a hand. "We are doubly honored," he said.

He excused himself, reappeared later in white trousers and a flowered shirt. Vivia and Lynn were the center of a group of younger man, Lynn seated on a lawn table, feet up, showing her nice legs, Vivia standing. The admiral joined the group for a few moments, then went off to talk to a group of older officers and their wives. High tea was served on the lawn. A Marine captain had taken over Lynn. Vivia divided her attentions, although Jeff Walters was always somewhere nearby. As evening approached, a Hawaiian musical group set up on the lawn and began to play the twangy, stringy island music. Unable ever to stay away from music, Vivia found herself learning the lyrics to "*The Hawaiian War Chant*" from the heavy-faced steel guitar player and then, Lynn joining in, doing a hula under the instructions of the drummer.

Before a perfumed darkness fell and the lawn was lit

by dozens of Japanese lanterns, the crowd began to thin. The late dinner was a feast. After dinner Vivian danced with Jeff, some of the other men, and later with Partier. He was a formal dancer, holding himself very, very straight, but he was in command of all the steps and she found it quite easy to follow him. Behind the guiding hand was a forceful personality.

She slept solidly and was awake with the dawn serenade of the birds, dressed quickly, crept out of the room so as not to disturb Lynn, made her way through an empty garden bejeweled by night dew, down the wooden steps and onto the small beach. The ocean was an incredible blue-green in the rising sun and the breakers made a soft, repetitious music. She walked toward the near rocks, climbed high to look out. On the horizon there were warships, low, dimly seen. She did not see Partier until he spoke.

"I'd like to be with them," he said.

She was startled, turned quickly. He sat, dressed in the same white slacks and flowered shirt, on a rock above her.

"I knew you were a lady of good, solid character," he said with a little laugh.

"How can you tell?"

"You're up with the sun when you don't have to be." He leaped lightly down from his perch, stood beside her. "It's a glorious time of day."

"Yes. I'll have to admit that I don't see it too often."

"As an entertainer, you work late hours, I suppose."

"I really haven't been an entertainer that long. I sang with a band for a couple of weeks and had to sleep through the mornings. Then I was traveling on a bus on the Blue Circuit. I saw the dawn a lot of times from a bus window."

"I love this place," he said. "When it's over and they kick me out for being too old, I'll come back here."

"It's beautiful," she said.

"Carol loved it too," he said.

"Your wife?"

"Yes."

"Jeff told me," she said. "I'm so sorry."

He cleared his throat. "She was much like you when she was younger."

"I'm flattered," she said.

He looked at her, a calm smile on his lips. "You're very well strung together for a girl your age. That was exactly the right thing to say to please me."

"Oh, I didn't say it just because of that. Gee—"

He laughed fondly. "And so young, so vibrantly young. You're like the mountain flowers, Vivia, so beautiful to look at."

"Now who is trying to please who?" she asked.

"You've got me," he said. He took a deep breath, expelled it. "Glorious morning. Up to a walk?"

"Sure."

"Up a hill?"

"I'll try."

The pathway was like a tunnel, beneath heavy green and multicolored foliage, birds darting among the thick green, the sun peeping through only occasionally. And then they were up high, looking down upon the house and the sea. There was a small pavilion beside a bubbling spring and they sat on slightly dew-dampened benches to look silently at the spread of beauty below them.

In being with him, there was a feeling she could not quite describe. Safety, comfort, confidence. It was not necessary to make idle conversation. She had felt that way, or something approaching it, with only one other person. Her sister. She looked at him. His eyes were squinted, his face intent, his eyes penetrating the distance out over the sea.

"Penny for your thoughts," she said.

He lowered his gaze. "I was thinking of my son." No falseness, just an open, frank admission.

"Jeff told me," she said. And then, a burst of emotion. "Dammit, sir, I don't see how you can be so . . . so . . . well, calm. It's too much. You don't deserve so much."

He put his hand atop hers. "Thank you. But others have given more." Then he smiled. "I'll always miss him. I'll always wonder if he would have made a good officer or just an adequate one. I'm sure he would have been a good one. Chip off the old block. See my ego sticking through?"

"He would have been."

"Well, then. You must try the spring water. The locals say it has medicinal properties."

She knelt on leafy softness, dipped the cool, clear wa-

ter into her hands, sipped it. "Ummm. It's cold." Looking up, laughing, water running down her chin, to see him musing at her, lips parted.

"Vivia, if I were twenty years younger. . . ."

She stood. "You're quite young."

"Again you know what to say to please me."

He led the way down the steep path, ordered breakfast, agreed with Vivia's statement that breakfast was her favorite meal along with dinner, lunch, and snacks. He ate as heartily as she, raised his eyebrows when she refused coffee with the usual "ugh."

"Never make a navy wife," he commented. "Coffee isn't just coffee, it's a religion in the navy."

"My loss," she said.

"And speaking of that, is there a boy back home? Or a boy in the service perhaps?"

"Friends," she said. She found herself telling him about E.O. and the famous zoot suit. He threw back his head and laughed, a nice laugh.

"Serves him right for being out of uniform."

And then she was talking, telling him of Liz, and how Liz and E.O. and good old Mark had been at Dutch Harbor and she'd seen them all in one glorious, fun reunion. About the trip around the Blue Circuit. He kept her talking with questions reflecting genuine interest. She felt a quick resentment when Jeff Walters showed up on the terrace with a brisk "Good morning, sir."

She wasn't very good at tennis, but Partier gave her a few pointers and they took Jeff and an officer's wife handily, the admiral doing most of the work, then swam in the pool in deliciously cool water piped in from the spring at the top of the hill. And then it was over and she was surprised to discover how little she'd thought about the show, her singing, her life while she'd been at Partier's home.

They did a show at an outlying base. There was still no word on when they'd leave Hawaii. On Tuesday Jeff Walters delivered an invitation to both Vivia and Lynn to dine at the senior officers' club.

As it happened, Jeff spoke to them within Bob B. Downs's hearing and, when Jeff had gone, Downs came over, a sour look on his face. "It's your choice," he said, "but I want you to remember that the services have their own grapevines. You've been spending a lot of time with

the brass, and you're gonna make yourself a reputation for being officer's meat if you don't watch out. That'll prejudice the enlisted men against you from the start."

"I am nobody's meat," Vivia said.

"All right, smart ass," Bob B. said, turning away.

"When did you lick the red off his candy?" Lynn asked.

"I dunno. He's getting more and more icky."

From her limited wardrobe she selected—what else?—the black. Black was Lynn's choice too, and the contrast was, they decided, okay. Vivia long-legged and blond, Lynn compact and dark. Both in black. Lynn broke into a little dance and Vivia linked arms and joined in. They sang "*Hey, daddy, I want a brand-new car, champagne, caviar*" and broke into gales of giggles when Lynn did a bump and grind. They were still smothering snickers when Jeff arrived, demanded to know the reason for their mirth, provoked more giggles and, throwing his eyes toward the unfeeling sky, laughingly questioned the mentality of all USO show girls.

Lynn's handsome Marine captain seized the little brunette and swept her off onto the dance floor, and then Vivia was looking into that pleasant, weather-roughened face, smiling her smile that was not a blaze but a quiet sunrise, felt the strong and gentle arm around her as they danced to "Moonlight Cocktails," Vivia singing quietly into his ear.

Later, at a table alone, she told him she'd just had a letter from her sister, that she was, although Liz couldn't say so, obviously not at Dutch Harbor any longer. "I'll bet she's coming out here," she said. "Oh, that would be fun. Gee, I'd love to see her. Good old solid Liz."

"You're fond of her."

"Come up with some more powerful words," she said.

"Elizabeth Wilder? Navy Nurse Corps?"

"Lieutenant Elizabeth Wilder," she said. "Officer and gentleman."

He said no more. She described the latest show and how it had been a huge success, and speculated on where she'd be going. The evening passing so pleasantly, so easily, so comfortably. She felt so at home with him, not required to watch what she said, not like with some people, felt free to let her thoughts wander.

"Australia, perhaps," he said, joining in her specula-

tion. "New Zealand. We have lots of men in both places. I really don't know, and if I did I wouldn't tell you. But there's no harm in guessing, is there?"

"I wouldn't ask you," she said, drawing up into a proud pose. "A slip of the lip can sink a ship."

He laughed. "And there are a few islands. The Canal is just about cleared of Japs, for example."

"That would be groovy. My friend Mark Fillmore was on that one. I read some of his stories from there."

"A good man," the admiral said. "Knows his war, knows his men. Before this is over you may have traveled almost as much as he has. We have men on Palmyra, for example. And I sometimes think that it may be worse to be stationed on a dot in the ocean like Palmyra, with nothing to fight but sheer tedium and the heat, than to be in a combat unit. The U.S.O. is doing a good job and as the war goes on and we continue our offensive there'll be other islands where men would welcome the sight of a pretty girl singer." He sighed. "I envy you, Vivia. Most of your life ahead of you, something worthwhile, seeing new places, meeting new people."

"Now that's self-pity," she said, without considering her audacity. She shrugged. "Didn't mean it, really."

"True, though. I could have had a combat command."

"Jeff says what you do is more important than having a combat command."

"Remind me to give that young man a promotion." He grinned.

"And you have a lot of life ahead of you. Gee, forty-seven isn't that old."

He gave her a mock severe frown. "Please make that a less qualified statement."

"Is that an order, sir?"

"Consider it so."

"Forty-seven isn't old at all, sir."

"Better," he said.

"Am I a good girl? Did I say it right?"

"Just right."

"And so I deserve a reward."

"Name it."

"Dance."

His face, for just a moment, showed his dismay, for the music was a medium-fast bounce and there were only a few couples on the floor, Lynn and her Marine among

them. "Have pity and pick another reward," he said with a rueful look.

"Not a chance." She dragged him onto the floor, swirled into action, using his strong arm as a fulcrum, laughing as he stiffly tried to keep the beat with feet that would not follow his orders.

"Go get 'em, Admiral," someone yelled, and he looked toward the voice sternly, then relaxed, smiled, loosened up a bit as Vivia showed the way. They went off the floor to the sound of scattered applause. Vivia, flushed with the movement, pleased with his having been a good sport, laughing, turned and looked into a face that froze the laugh in her throat and sent a little chill down her back. Terry Adams stood with one elbow on the bar, lifting his glass to her, a knowing smile on his face.

"Do you know that young officer?" Partier asked.

"Yes. I met him in San Francisco," she said, outer composure recovered, but a feeling of loss, of shame, inside her.

"Why don't you invite him over for a drink?"

"Oh, well, we are just acquaintances," she said. But Terry had put down his glass and, with a look of determination, made his way toward them. Partier watched him approach with an expressionless face. Vivia jerked her eyes away, then back. He was a full lieutenant now and, damn his eyes, he was handsome as he swiveled his way between tables, a smile forming.

"Sir," he said, his eyes on Vivia's face, "may I intrude to say hello to an old friend?"

"Be my guest, Lieutenant," the admiral said.

"Hello, Vivia."

"Terry," she said.

"Long time no see."

"How original," she said. "Think of that all by yourself?"

His face tensed, then relaxed into a smile. "Ah, you got me," he said. "It's an old joke, sir. One of us catches the other in a cliché and pow! You know, sir?" Partier was silent.

"Sir, do you mind if I ask the lady to dance?" Terry asked.

"Up to the lady," Partier said curtly.

She started to say no, flatly, rudely, finally. Then she reconsidered and rose. At first the touch of his hand sent

a shiver of revulsion through her. She did not allow him to pull her tightly to him, using hidden strength to stay stiffly at arm's length.

"Vivia, I know what you must think," he said, when they were on the dance floor.

A flush of sheer anger almost made her explode. "You incredible bastard," she whispered through a smile.

"Listen, I tried to come back. I tried to call. You know how it is. Duty. When Uncle says move, you move."

"Lost any more aircraft carriers?"

He grinned. "Nope. I've learned my trade. You haven't heard? I'm an ace. Two Bettys, a Zeke, and two Zeros."

"All from a training squadron or a desk?"

"Ah, well," he said. "Look, I was young and insecure. I am sorry I lied to you, but Jesus, Vivia, I've never stopped thinking of you."

"You were thinking of me when you sent your buddy to get a little of the easy stuff too," she said, her eyes cold, her lips smiling. "Look, big shot, I danced with you for one reason and one reason only. I wanted a chance to tell you what a bastard you are. And to tell you to stay away from me. I don't want to see your face and I don't want to hear your name."

His stricken look had no effect on her. "Hey," he said, "I know I treated you rough, kid. Wanta know why?" He didn't wait for an answer. "I'll admit that when it started I was on the make, feeding you a line. Then I realized that I wasn't lying any more, that I was in love with you, and, quite frankly, it scared the hell out of me. I ran like a rabbit and I've been sorry ever since. Any chance of you giving me a second shot at it?"

For one wild and helpless moment she wanted to believe him. Incredible to think that, as much as she'd hated him, he could have that effect on her, make her want to give, to melt toward him. In that desperate moment it came back to her, the feel of his lips on hers, the thrill she'd felt when, there in that little hotel room, he'd bared her for the first time, kissed her in places where she'd never been touched before. And then it was gone, for she also remembered the feeling of desolation she'd known in the same hotel, standing in the lobby to be told that Lieutenant Terry Adams had checked out.

She looked at him for a long moment, saw the familiar face, the twinkling eyes. And she knew she'd never loved

him, that it had been, as the kids used to say, a simple case of hot pants on her part. She'd been ripe for the plucking and he'd been the harvester. Nor did she hate him anymore. She laughed suddenly, and felt a change in herself, a new maturity.

"You really are something," she said.

"I mean it, Vivia. You're the most beautiful girl I've ever known."

"Sure, sure," she said. "Well, I have to hand it to you, Lieutenant Terry Adams, you've got balls. Tell me, wasn't there just a little feeling of guilt when you seduced a high school girl?"

"A little," he said. "You're not a high school girl anymore."

"Thank God," she said. The music ended, the band putting down instruments for a break. "Well, it's been nice seeing you, Terry boy. Don't bother to see me back to the table. I can find it on my own. And don't make me have to be rude to you by putting yourself in my immediate presence again. Dig, baby?"

"Vivia—"

"I mean it," she said.

"Yes, I think you do." He bowed low, turned quickly. Back at the table Partier smiled as he stood to hold her chair. "Have a nice old-time buddy chat?"

"Yes," she said. "He was telling me he's an ace now."

"Oh, really?" Partier said. "His name is Adams?"

"Terry Adams."

"I can't place him," Partier said, and, a few minutes later, having motioned a balding commander to the table, he asked, "Lieutenant Adams is one of your boys, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir," the commander said.

"Where did he see his combat duty?"

"Sir?"

"Combat duty. I hear he's quite the fighter. Five Jap planes."

"Must be someone else," the commander said. "Lieutenant Adams hasn't seen any action. He's a good pilot. In the States he was an instructor for a while, and over here he flies check flights with pilots being introduced to the F-4U for the first time."

Vivia flushed. Lying again. But it didn't matter. She was glad she'd run into him. Now, having seen him again,

having found out once more that he was a congenital liar, he was out of her system forever.

And it was possible to ignore him, even when he was in the same room. Once she saw him dancing with Lynn, but then Lynn was back with her Marine. She put him out of her mind finally and just relaxed, enjoying the secure and comfortable feeling of being in Admiral Partier's good hands.

Two more performances, rumors that orders would come soon, that transportation was being arranged. Destination west, but unknown. And, that was the week Lynn fell in love and Vivia, once again had Terry Adams intrude in her life. The intrusion came after a show. A slightly intoxicated Fleet Air Wing lieutenant commander singled her out as she came off stage and headed for the portable dressing room. She had become more tolerant of such things and had developed a sure and easy way of being friendly, yet cool, of brushing off unwanted invitations, regardless of the rank of the man extending them. The wobbly lieutenant commander, who looked older than the admiral, gave her a wink and a leering smile and said, "Hey, baby, I loved your singing. How about you and me have dinner and a few little drinkies?"

"Sorry, sir," she said. "Previous engagement." She started to walk past and he took her arm, pulling her to a halt.

"S'no way to be," he slurred. "Come on, baby. We'll have a big time. Hot time in the old town tonight, you know?"

"No, thank you, sir," she said coldly, directing her eyes meaningfully toward the hand on her arm.

"No need to be snooty, honey," he said. "Ole Jack'll be good to you, show you a real good time," and there was the almost obscene wink again.

"Ole Jack," she said, getting a bit angry, "take your goddamned hand off my arm right now or I'll call the S.P.'s."

He pulled away, head wobbling, eyes struggling to focus. "Well, goddamn me," he said. "I got a buddy says you weren't so snooty in a hotel room in Frisco."

She got Terry's office phone number from the officers' club. "Hey, nice surprise," he said, when she told him who was calling.

"I want to see you, Terry, as soon as possible," she said.

"Tonight?" he asked, his voice going knowing and cozy. "Right now, if possible."

"Never let it be said I kept a beautiful lady waiting."

When he drove up in a staff car, she was standing in front of the BOQ in which she had a room. She got in and he tried to kiss her. She shoved him away roughly.

"Hey, okay. No rush. Where to? I know a nice little beach and I've got the day off."

"Cut the shit," she said sharply. "And listen. For the second time now some slobbering son-of-a-bitch has come sniffing around me telling me that good old buddy Terry has told him what easy picking I am."

His face went red.

"Now listen, Terry, and listen closely. It will not happen again. I don't know how many men this little boy has told about his great conquest in San Francisco, but you are going to remember how many and you're going to go and untell it, because if another one of little boy's friends comes around with that story I'm going to go to my friend, the admiral, and little boy is going to get the chance to be the hero he tells people he is. Do you understand me? I mean, little boy, that I'll get your ass shipped out to the toughest combat zone the navy can find. You dig, little boy?"

He recovered enough to give her a weak sneer.

"Do you doubt I can have it done?" she asked.

"You have the right equipment to convince an older man," he said nastily.

"You bet your sweet ass," she said with a little smile. "And now, go somewhere and perform an anatomical impossibility on yourself, little boy." She hoped, as she heard the door slam behind her, that she'd broken the window glass.

It was later that Lynn started acting starry-eyed, began to woolgather, forgot her close harmony part in the arrangements, got tangle-footed during the dance routines.

"Hey, what's with you?" Vivia demanded.

"Nothing." But there was a faraway look, a glassy, silly look in those brown eyes.

"Who is it?" Vivia asked sternly.

"Nobody."

"Don't lie to me, Lynn Briefer," she said. "You haven't gone and gotten yourself into trouble, have you?"

"Trouble?" She smiled. "Nooooooooo," she crooned.

"I see. True love, is it?"

"Oh, Vivia."

"That nice Marine captain?"

A startled look. "Oh, no. Well . . . I guess I can tell you. He's the most wonderful man I've ever met."

"I'll bet," Vivia said with a sigh.

"We're going to be married after the war."

"Sure."

"Really. Oh, Vivia, I'm glad you asked. I've been dying to tell you, but he says we should keep it a secret. He'll be going back into combat soon and he says that if his commanding officer finds out that he's in love, he won't be allowed to go on the dangerous missions. The commanding officer is his good buddy, and he doesn't want to be put in the position of not doing his share to win the war."

She should have tumbled right then.

"Just be careful, Lynn, will you?"

"Oh, don't worry. He loves me and I love him. Gosh, he's so wonderful. Won't touch me. Says he wants to marry a virgin. Says he'll look after me."

Something kept ringing and ringing but Vivia didn't answer. She didn't wake up, until late on a Friday evening, Lynn came in with sand in her hair and a blissful look on her face.

"Oh, God, what a wonderful afternoon," Lynn said. "We went to this little beach and"—a little giggle—"the fool had two long-stemmed champagne glasses in a little container. . . ."

Bing. Bong.

"And," Vivia said, "he told you all about having to ditch in the sea after the *Lexington* was sunk, and how he's an ace. Let me see, is it two Bettys and a Zeke and two Zeros?"

Lynn went pale. "Vivia? How did you know?"

"Oh, honey," she said, taking Lynn's arm, realizing what she was about to do, but bound to do it anyhow. Lynn was so young, so innocent. And that son-of-a-bitch—"Lynn, you haven't done anything crazy, have you? I mean, you haven't let him . . . ?"

"No," Lynn said quickly. "You just don't know him, Vivia. He wouldn't. He's sweet and he loves me and he wouldn't do anything to hurt me. God, I have to admit that I probably would if he would. When he kisses me—"

"Lynn, come and sit down." She forced Lynn to sit down on the bed. "You're probably going to hate me—"

"How could I ever?"

"Listen. This afternoon, on the beach, did he kiss you and kiss you and kiss you?"

Lynn flushed. She nodded.

"And then, just when you were sure you had gone too far and that whatever he wanted to do he could do, he stopped and made his little honor speech and then said, 'Hey, just one little thing,' and ended up chewing your breast?"

"Vivia, you're beginning to worry me," Lynn said.

"And what about this weekend. Plans?" She nodded grimly. "There's a band playing in the Royal Hawaiian."

"You're a witch," Lynn said.

"And you'll have a couple of drinks, and then somehow you'll end up in his hotel room and he'll be kissing your breasts and he'll say, 'Look, it's all right, because we did this the other day on the beach and I wouldn't take your virginity because I'm good old trustworthy Terry.'"

"Vivia—" Lynn gasped.

"Terry Adams," Vivia said.

"How do you know?" Lynn asked, somewhat belligerent.

She thought it over. She'd never envisioned herself telling *that* story to anyone, but this was Lynn, her friend, just a young girl, much like she'd been when she first encountered Terry Adams and his line.

"I know, honey," she said, "because I heard all of it, the promises, the let's-wait-until-after-the-war and then let's-do-it-now, the champagne glasses on the beach, the just-one-little-thing line—"

"You're lying. When? You couldn't. You've been with the admiral—"

"Back home, in San Francisco."

"I don't believe you."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Lynn. What for? If you don't believe me, let's go find him now. Let's face him together."

"He's on a training flight to the big island. He won't be back until late tomorrow and I'm supposed to meet him at the Royal Hawaiian." She rose, tears running down her cheeks.

"Hey," Vivia said, "it isn't the end of the world. You've

just run into a wolf, that's all. It can happen to anyone. It happened to me."

"I hate you," Lynn said forcefully, the tears streaking her cheeks. "You're hateful."

"It's the truth."

"Maybe it is. Maybe you wouldn't lie, but it's different. He *does* love me. Maybe he thought he loved you. Oh, God, I don't know." She started to leave the room and Vivia moved in front of her.

"Stay with me? Maybe we'll sneak into the officers' club for dinner."

"I don't want to see you for a little while, Vivia. I'm sorry, but I just don't."

"Lynn, forgive me? It was bad for me to have to tell you, but I can't just stand by—"

"No, you've got to be Miss God, Miss Busybody. You've got to show how mature you are, how much more you know." And she was gone, a sob trailing behind her, to leave Vivia standing, frozen, before a look of intense thought covered her face.

He was not at the senior officers' club when she called, nor could the manager of the club give her a number. She got Jeff Walters's number, instead. "Jeff, where's the admiral?"

"He's up at the big house for the weekend," he said.

"Could you do me a favor and run me up there?"

There was a momentary silence. Then: "Sure. He's asked you to come, has he?"

"Not exactly," she said. "I just need to see him."

"Well, I'll take you if you think it's necessary, Vivia, but I will tell you that the old man's been working pretty hard and had planned this weekend for rest. No guests. But I think he'd be pleased to see you."

"Well, no," she said, thinking quickly. It would be better this way. "If he's resting I won't bother him."

"Sure?"

"Yes, thanks, Jeff."

"Dinner with a lowly lieutenant commander?"

"Some other time, Jeff, okay?"

"Is that a promise?"

"Sure, if you want it to be."

"I'll hold you to it."

She packed hurriedly, a change of underwear, her best, a robe, a nightgown, toothbrush, swim suit, the black

dress. It took little persuasion to get a jeep from the CPO. The driver was a seaman who seemed awed just being in the same jeep with her, and she chatted in a friendly way, asking him where he was from, all about his family, and then she was there. There were lights in the lower floor of the big white house, the windows open to the pleasant night air. There was a puzzled look from the houseboy and then Partier, in a nice smoking jacket, was coming toward her, hands held out.

"What a delightful surprise," he said.

"Admiral, if I'm intruding—"

"Nonsense. Come in, come in." He guided her into a masculine bamboo and leather study. She had resolved to tell him the truth, all of it, or as much as necessary to have Lieutenant Terry Adams sent away from Hawaii before it was too late for Lynn.

"Something is bothering you," he said.

"Yes."

"What can I do to help?"

She opened her mouth to begin and, suddenly the truth came to her with a surging thunder of emotion. "Just let me be with you," she said, so truthfully that it hurt, deep down, and resulted in a sudden flood of silent tears that drew him from his deep, leather-covered chair to lift her from her chair and cradle her head on his shoulder. He smelled of fine tobacco, brandy, good aftershave. He put his arms around her, patted her back, saying, "There, there," in a comforting voice.

She sobbed for only a moment, then drew back her wet face. "Oh, damn, sir," she said.

"What is it?"

"I don't even know your n-n-n-ame," she sobbed, crawling back toward him to bury her face in the smooth fabric of his smoking jacket.

"William," he said softly. "Bill to my friends."

She drew away, sniffing back the last tears. "All right," she said. "Now I'm all right. I'm sorry, B-b-ill."

"I'm not. I'm pleased that you came to me. What *can* I do?" He brightened. "Look, there is something." He grinned at her. "A bit of news. I went to a bit of bother to get it, and until next week it's secret, of course, but a certain nurses corps will dock at Pearl next Wednesday at the latest. Now, isn't that good news?"

"Gee, yes," she said, brightening, wondering what in

heaven and earth was happening to her. "Oh, yes, sir, that's wonderful news."

"Bill," he said.

"Bill."

"And now that you feel better, perhaps you can sit down and tell me the reason for the tears."

She sat. She thought about it. And the truth was that Terry was not as important as just being here in this house, sitting with him, seeing his reassuring, kindly, handsome, masculine face. "I was missing you," she said, and it was the honest-to-God truth, but not the truth she had intended telling.

"Vivia," he said gently, "don't give an old man false hopes."

"Oh, I wouldn't," she said quickly. "And you're not old." This last with her blaze of a smile. And then, her heart beating fast, "Admiral William Partier, are you going to kiss me or shall I kiss you?"

"Would you object very much to a bit of both?" he asked, rising.

No flames, no breathlessness, no fire and thunder, just a steady little buzzy feeling that began in her head, and the feel of his body, bending to her, in his arms and his mouth on hers as the kiss deepened and his arms held her close, so comfortably, so gently. A time loss, legs beginning to protest as they stood there in the study, locked together, and then he was leading and she was more than willing to go wherever he took her. She wanted to laugh, it was so funny. One stupid experience with Terry and for over a year she had not been kissed until this tall, gentle, older man kissed her as she'd never been kissed before, not demandingly, but lovingly, tenderly, passionately, deeply. Instead of the bedroom wing upstairs he was taking her out into the cool night, into a gentle sea breeze and a slight moisture. He sat beside her on a metal glider with a billion stars in the clear sky and the sea reflecting them and the moon way down below at the foot of the cliff.

"A little bit of both, sir?" she asked, cuddling up against him.

"By all means," he said. "But we talk a bit first."

"Is that an order, sir?"

"Bill, you minx."

"Is that an order, sir Bill?"

"Vivia, you're a ray of light in the dark, hope in the midst of blackness. You're too good to be true. Now, mind you, I can't say that I'm in love with you, not yet. I love you as I love all beauty. I want you with a desire I thought had long passed me by."

"Bill—"

"No, wait a minute," he said, putting his hand on her lips. "I can be in love with you, if that's what you want. Is it?"

"I don't know. I just know I feel good being with you. I want to be with you every minute that I can be. I feel so good and so safe and so happy when I'm with you."

"May and December," he said with a chuckle. "They'll say old Bill Partier is in his second childhood. It won't be good for my career."

"Oh," she said, "I wouldn't want—"

"Hush," he whispered. "Do you think I would care? But you. What's in it for you? A father image? What do you want, little girl?"

She thought for a moment and she knew what she had to say. "I want to sing. I want to continue the tour and I want to be with you and I can't have both, can I?"

"Well, not both at once and constantly."

His arm was around her shoulder. She was content to sit there, to feel his body warmth. When he spoke again his voice was even softer. "There's your reputation to consider."

"And yours."

"But you will stay?" he asked, turning his face toward her.

She giggled. "You couldn't even order me away, sir Bill."

After a long time he stood, pulled her to her feet, kissed her and then his arm around her slim waist, walked her into the house. There was a dreamy slowness about their movements, through the terraces, the Hawaiian room, the living room, to the broad wooden stairs and up, slowly, her head on his shoulder, his arm around her, and then at the head of the stairs his bedroom, so masculine, huge bed, big pillows, browns and reds and tans and two comfortable chairs and a lav and an open door to the toilet. Long kisses with that quiet, mature hunger and a depth of spirit she'd never experienced before. It was all right, so right.

"Second thoughts, lady?" he asked, holding her at arm's length, examining her face as if he were seeing it for the first or the last time.

"Only one thing you should know," she whispered, eyes downcast.

"I need only to know that you're here, that you want to be here."

"It's—ah . . . there's no need to *worry*."

"What do you mean?"

"When I was eighteen," she said, "there was this thing in me. It had to be taken out. I can't, ah, well, I can't get pregnant."

"Oh, my dear," he sighed, holding her close.

He undressed her slowly. She'd worn her uniform. She stood before him in panties and bra, eyes looking into his, unashamed. His eyes could not get enough of her. And then his hands touched the smooth skin of her sides, her stomach, loving hands, tender hands, unbelieving hands. He guided her to the huge bed. She lay, one arm above her head, and watched him undress, the light of one bedside lamp making the room cozy, but offering good vision. Still in panties and bra, she put up her arms to him and took him to her, felt the weight of his torso on hers.

With Terry it had been so quick, so sudden. With Bill it was a dreamy fall into a molten, blissful state of awareness that grew as he grew, slowly, slowly. His hands teased her, fingers stroked her skin, sneaked under the bra and panties tantalizingly. Lips touched neck, shoulders, taut stomach, came back to be lip to lip with hers. And, with a perversity that made her gasp in disappointment, he drew away from her and sat Indian fashion at her feet, his eyes studying her body.

"So beautiful," he said.

"Hey, Bill," she said, reaching out her arms for him.

"Soon," he said. "First some more talk. When you came in, there was something bothering you."

"Loneliness, I guess," she said. "It's all gone."

"No, it was something. Tell me."

She sighed. Might as well get it over. No longer for herself but for Lynn now. "Do you have to be so smart?"

"Admirals are supposed to be a little bit smart."

"There was something. It's my friend, Lieutenant Terry Adams. He asked me to talk to you about something and I was reluctant to do it."

"About what?"

"Well, he's got this job, you know, giving check flights to other pilots, and he wants more than anything to get into combat. I mean he's pining away, thinking that the war is going to be over and he won't have done anything but teach other men how to go out and fight. Could you do something for him?"

His face changed halfway through her speech and she continued with a little, growing feeling of unease. When she finished he was looking at her grimly. "I can't and won't go over the head of his commanding officer."

"Not even for me?" she asked with that blaze of a smile.

He unwound, stepped off the bed, began to dress. He pulled his pants on and turned, buttoning his smoking jacket. "If you had just asked I might have helped, but this." He put contempt into it.

"No, Bill," she said. "No, you've got it all wrong."

"Shut up," he said. "Yes, you certainly have the equipment to work on an aging man, but you went about it wrong." And he was going.

"Bill, Bill," she cried, leaping from the bed to catch him in the door. "No, please—"

"I can't provide transportation back to the base tonight," he said. "Please remove your things from this room and choose a bedroom down the hall."

"Oh, Bill, please."

His gentleness was gone. He pushed her away forcefully and without a backward look he was gone, leaving her crushed. She gathered her clothing, dressed, thought about trying to walk back to the base, decided against it. It was miles. She went down the hall to the room she'd shared with Lynn on that lovely weekend.

She awoke long after the moon had set to a deep and humming darkness of nightbirds and insects and soft warmth. Her eyes were raw and red. She turned on a light, squinted until her pupils adjusted, went to the bath and washed her face. God, she'd really messed it up and, damnit, he was wrong. Not even Lynn, bless her, meant that much. He was so wrong and now she'd never have a chance to tell him and would never feel his strong arms around her and know his kiss and then she was ripping off the uniform, applying a bit of perfume, putting on her pretty nightgown. So he was a strong-minded and master-

ful man? Maybe that was what she liked about him. Well, she could be strong-minded and masterful too. She was Vivian Wilder and she'd never wanted a man as she wanted him.

His door was unlocked. She stood in the doorway a moment then stepped inside, closed the door behind her, let her eyes adjust from the light of the hallway. He lay on his back and he was buzzing a soft little snore, somehow endearing. She tiptoed to the bed, sat down carefully, rose, nodding her head, thinking that, yes, it would be best to remove the nightgown. Nude, skin feeling the cool night air, she crawled onto the bed, drew near, lowered her body to his slowly, carefully. He slept in the nude. As she put her weight on him he made a little sound, but did not awaken. She began to press soft little kisses on his face, on his lips, and he awoke with a start.

"What?" he half yelled.

"Shut up," she hissed. "Bill Partier, you just shut up and listen. I know what you think. You may even have heard something. I don't care. What I want you to know is that I came up here to ask you to get Terry Adams transferred, not to go to bed with you, and it was you and your sweetness that made going to bed with you a helluva lot more important than a dozen Terrys and I'm not going to let you get out of it so you just shut up." Her hand on his mouth, nudeness on nudeness, feeling the hardness begin to swell and brush against her thigh. "I don't do this as a habit or as a rule and I've only been in bed with one other man before in my whole life and if you have to hear it I'll tell you all about it so you'll realize that it didn't mean a goddamned thing and it's you I want. Do you understand?"

"Hey—"

"No, just shut up. I'll do the talking. You're the boss, you're the admiral, and you jumped to conclusions without giving me a chance and now I'm going to show you that I mean it when I say I want you more than I've ever wanted anyone."

He was, damnit, chuckling behind her hand over his mouth and his hands had come up and were caressing the small of her back and then he was feeling the outthrust of her smooth rump and sending delicious shivers all over her.

"Vivia," he said, his voice muffled. She took away her hand. "How about you shut up, okay?"

"Yes, sir," she said, sinking down to his kiss.

After long, languorous minutes of preparation, of caresses and kisses that made her quake, he entered her.

"Oh, God, oh, yes, yes, yes," she moaned, and the glory of her body bloomed and expanded and crested like a huge storm breaker. Much later: "Permission to speak, sir?" This in a soft, relaxed, happy voice.

"Granted," he said.

"A request, sir."

"Speak."

"Permission to sleep in your arms, sir."

"Granted, gladly," he said with one last, sated, sleepy, wet, warm, wonderful kiss.

Dawn. Sleepy, but feeling wonderful, a walk on the beach and, in a quiet and deserted cove, naked together to run into the warm sea and swim there until tiredness was gone and she was wide awake. A huge, splendid, wonderful breakfast and, by mutual, silent consent, sneaking away to the big bed where wonders were repeated to be followed by a nice, limb-entangled nap and a huge lunch and a wonderful night during which there was a long session of talking and a lot of quiet kisses and at last one long, slow, never-ending union that ended in more wonder.

"If I'd known how nice older men are," she teased, "I'd have become a nymphet at age four."

"And then the older men would have been eight, or ten, more than twice your age, as I am."

No thought of Terry, or of Lynn, except now and then a nagging little worry.

Late Sunday afternoon. The terrace in the shade of a huge, large-leafed tree. "Bill, I've been thinking. You don't have to marry me if it would be detrimental to your career. I'll just be your mistress, or you can tell people that you've hired me to look after your house."

"Which even the more intelligent lower ranks would believe readily," he said, matching the teasing tone of her voice.

"No, seriously. If you'd like to marry me, I'll say yes in a minute. But maybe it wouldn't be wise, at least not until the war is over." And then, thinking of leaving with-

out him, her face puckered and he, seeing the change in mood, took her into his arms.

"Hey, hey, I'm not a two-star admiral for nothing. I have rank and pull. You're going to be here for a while."

"How long?" she asked, pulling back to look into his face.

"Keep a secret?"

"Just me and you, buddy boy."

"Until next weekend."

"Oh, goddamn," she said.

"Why do you use profanity?"

"All us musicians do," she said. "It's the way I feel, thinking of leaving you."

"I can make a tour of the Pacific anytime I choose," he said, "and when you're going to be in one place for a few days, I *will* choose. We'll scandalize the ranks and you'll come to be known as officer's meat."

"Well, boy, it ain't bad duty," she said.

"Nice duty for me too," he said. "Harder on me than you to be separated. I'll be prey to the temptation to go chasing you all over the ocean and I'll have daily fights with my conscience."

"I have the greatest faith in you, Admiral."

But leaving him, seeing him standing there in the front entry, tall and so goddamned gorgeous she almost couldn't stand it, she got a taste of things to come.

Bob B. Downs had left a note on her door. She frowned, because it was not a pleasant note. It said in no uncertain terms to call him the minute she chose to come back to her quarters. She did. "Where the hell have you been?" he roared. "Paul wanted to go over a new number."

"I'm available now," she said.

"You'd better damned well be," he said, "or this troupe is going to have a new girl singer. Eight A.M. sharp."

Well, she thought, him and the horse he rode in on. She went looking for Lynn, found her in her room. She refused to answer Vivia's knock and turned her head away when Vivia finally opened it to see Lynn sitting, red-eyed, in the one chair.

"Lynn, honey?"

"I hope you're happy," Lynn said.

"Obviously, you're not," Vivia said. "What's happened?"

"He's gone, that's what's happened."

"Gone? Oh, no." Before or after Saturday night in the hotel? But, in spite of herself, there was an element of comedy deep down. Ole Terry had struck with the Four F's again, find 'em, feed 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em.

Lynn began to weep quietly. "He didn't get back from the big island Saturday, not until Sunday morning. He sent word by radio and one of his friends came to me Saturday evening. We had it all planned to spend Sunday afternoon and evening together and all of a sudden he had orders and all I could do was go out to the harbor and say g-g-good-bye and watch him climb aboard a PBY."

"You saw him?"

"Y-y-ess."

Well, sir Bill, bless you. Fast work, my wonderful lover, and you'll never know what you've saved poor Lynn from.

"Lynn, Lynn, I know how you feel. It'll all work out. He'll be back and you'll have had time to think and he'll have had time to think. And if you two really are in love you'll get married and live happily ever after."

"You can't possibly know how I feel," Lynn said tearfully. "You're too stuck on Vivia Wilder. You can't possibly ever know how it is to be in love, because you think the whole frigging world is here just for your benefit."

"Lynn, we'll talk later, when you feel better, okay?"

"I don't care if I never see you again," Lynn said. "I asked him about you Sunday. Oh, yes, I did. And he told me how you tried to yell rape and get him to marry you. I've got your number, Miss Vivia Wilder, and I'm going to be sure that everyone else has it too. You'll see."

Good old Terry had struck again.

"That's not true, Lynn," she said. "Someday you'll know it's not."

But there was no sense trying to convince a young girl in love. Vivia closed the door sadly and went to her room. She'd be able to talk some sense into Lynn later. At the moment, she just wanted to be alone, to think of the weekend, the weekend Vivia came of age.

EIGHT

MAROONED in a backwater of the war, following the bloodless occupation of the island of Kiska, Liz Wilder began to feel a restlessness that produced letter after letter to her superiors all the way to Washington. Each letter was a request for transfer to a more active post. A few of the corpsmen had already been shipped out and she'd lost two nurses, but the workload was so small their absence did not mean hardship. The only thing worse than too much work is too little work, and the tedium led to bickering among the staff and magnifying insignificant incidents.

At least the navy knew of her existence, for the mail contained packets of information about regulations, techniques, procedures. She decided that everyone in the Navy Department was so busy producing new paper that nobody had time to consider the waste of a good surgical nurse.

Things were relatively quiet elsewhere in the Pacific. She knew so because Mark's dispatches were of the morale-building type, always datelined "somewhere in the Pacific." The only odd piece had been about a crew of navy nurses on duty at Efate in the New Hebrides where the enemies were bugs, mildew, heat, flies, bats. There patients watched the geckos crawl miraculously around on the ceiling to catch insects and the Seabees, bless them, had built a hot locker powered by light bulbs to help the nurses dry their uniforms in the overwhelming humidity.

In a way, the article about nurses in the South Pacific was a message to her, a reminder that he was thinking of her. She read and reread it, envying the nurses there, who had work to do at least, perhaps with the wounded from New Guinea. She laughed when Mark wrote about the nurses enjoying "jungle milk shakes," a fresh coconut opened by bayonet.

He was getting around, as usual, writing about the men who flew from carriers, about the ingenious charcoal-burning autos of Australia with huge burners on the fender and pipes running to the motor, and a tongue-in-

cheek feature about the difficulty the Japs were having decoding the "Hutsut Song."

In keeping with the unofficial motto of all the services—*hurry up and wait*—Liz's orders arrived at about the time she was expected to leave.

They were delivered by the supervisor of Alaskan area nurses. She flew in on a PBY, staged an impromptu inspection, and then requested a word with Liz in her quarters.

"Lieutenant," she began, "you've come close to pissing off a few people with your constant requests for transfer."

"I'm sorry," Liz said. "It's the way I feel. I feel as if I'm being wasted here."

"We had not forgotten you."

She smiled. "Sometimes I wasn't sure."

"The aircraft on which I arrived will leave in one hour," the supervisor said. "You will be on it."

"My God! An hour?"

"You got what you wanted. Don't complain."

"Ma'am, there's one other thing—"

"Isn't there always?" the supervisor sighed.

"We've developed a good work team here. Is there a possibility that I could take some of my people with me to my new station?"

"You anticipate me. I was just going to tell you that you may choose one nurse to go with you. The rest will be needed here."

"Only one," she said. "Well, Marcie Evans, then. And E.O. Gardner, corpsman."

"There's no lack of corpsmen where you're going."

"But he works well with me."

"Well . . . he'll be getting orders soon anyhow," the supervisor said. "Request granted. Tell them to get the lead out, Lieutenant."

Hurry up and wait. One day later they were in San Francisco, having left behind many of the personal possessions they'd accumulated in Dutch Harbor. E.O. was ecstatic. He wanted liberty immediately, planning to spend all of it in a record shop listening booth digging the new discs. Liz took Marcie home with her and put her up in Vivian's old room. Although her mother and father looked a bit older, a little tired, they were in good health and spirits.

They spent a lovely two weeks, not doing much of any-

thing except resting, enjoying the mild weather of a San Francisco summer, taking in a few movies, walking, being fattened by Mrs. Wilder's good cooking. And then they reported for duty at Alameda to wait some more. Their most optimistic guess had been right. They were assigned to a hospital ship.

The ship sat proudly in the water, workers swarming over her decks. Once she'd carried bridge-playing, dancing, drinking passengers under tropical stars. Now she was in warpaint, new, gleaming, the red cross flaming from her sides.

Liz was to be an operating room supervisor, and she was pleased that her training would now be put to full use. She admired the gleaming array of equipment, the dental chairs, X-ray machines, floodlit operating tables, labs—the equipment of several small hospitals in one, crowded with magnificent precision into the confines of the ship. The operating suites were situated amidships to avoid the pitching of bow or stern.

The wards too, were designed for the maximum utility of space, bunks three deep on either side of a passageway that was just wide enough for two people if one turned sidewise. Overhead were the usual shipboard mazes of piping, bare metal painted olive drab.

Liz shared a small cabin with Marcie, and with Douglas, for he had become very much a part of her life and had, at Dutch Harbor during the long, long wait, become popular with the nurses. They all knew his story. He represented their sister nurses, those veterans who had served, before the war, in China and the Philippines, in Japan and Samoa; but most of all Douglas was a symbol of those who had stayed behind at Bataan and Corregidor, of Lucy Anne James, friend of Ethel Johnston, who had died in the foggy northern islands.

Marcie Evans had probably begun Douglas's career as silent confessor, advisor, solace to nurses in trouble or down with a terminal case of the blues, loneliness, or worry. Marcie had come into Liz's room one night, after weeks had gone by without a letter from her boyfriend in the Air Corps. In a bad way, wanting to talk and not having words, Marcie had latched onto Douglas, rocking him quietly in Ethel Johnston's rocking chair, hugging him.

Liz, speaking lightly, asked, "Wanta borrow him for a while?"

Marcie brought the monkey back a day or so later, with a name tag in a waterproof envelope on which she'd written "Thanks, Pal" and her name, rank and station.

So Douglas had a place of honor in their quarters. E.O. spread the word about those two silly women who sought comfort in a stuffed animal and the career of Douglas-the-monkey was launched.

It was both frustrating and fascinating to watch the good ship *Solicitude* undergoing the final tunings, fittings, polishings, testings. It all went so slowly. Other white ladies, as the hospital ships were called, were seeing action in the Pacific, while theirs was still sitting in the shipyard. A sister ship, the *Solace*, had been at Pearl on December 7, had come through the bombings without being hit. Other hospital ships were busily carrying the island wounded to New Zealand and Hawaii, and ferrying convalescent men to the States. The Navy Nurse Corps was coming of age in 1943, building an all-volunteer force that would eventually reach eleven thousand nurses.

There was plenty of off-time and Liz and Marcie often went into the city dressed in their blues with the jaunty overseas cap, dark hose, dark shoes. Aboard ship, it was either the whites, skirt just below the knees, cap with gold braid across the front, white shoes, or fatigue wear if the going were messy. For days it was only nurses and corpsmen. Then, as the engine room crew began to test the huge machines that would power the ship, the doctors began arriving. As senior nurse aboard, Liz was the reception committee, directing corpsmen in helping the doctors get settled in. Commander Earl Oliver would be their chief medical officer. He was in his late forties, career navy, and it pleased Liz when this man complimented her on the job the nurses and corpsmen had done in preparing the operating rooms.

"Heard about your work in Alaska, Wilder," Commander Oliver said. This was another pleasant surprise. She was under the impression that no one had heard anything at all about Alaska. "Too bad about Ethel Johnston."

"We all miss her," Liz said.

"Served with her in the China Sea," Oliver said. "Good nurse. If she approved of you, you're a good nurse. That's all you have to be. You and your girls will be working with a fine staff of doctors. And, as you probably know

from your experience in the Aleutians, the work will come in great, bloody rushes. Between times of action we'll run a loose ship, get plenty of rest. I think a good recreation program is essential. Any suggestion about who should run it?"

"Marcie Evans," she said, without hesitation. "And E.O. Gardner."

"Brought 'em with you, did you? One thing, Wilder. No favorites. A good officer doesn't play favorites."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly.

"Another thing. Does the ship's store carry insignia of rank?"

"I don't know."

"Find out. Buy yourself some new trinkets. You're going to be my good right hand, Wilder. You won't thank me for it, because I'll work your butt off. But I want you to have some more authority, so you're now a full lieutenant."

She repressed a little smile. "Thank you, sir."

"Save it."

At first the medical crew protested the compulsory activities labeled recreation, but they came to accept it as the ship became more and more complete, more fully staffed. E.O. became cheerleader and director of exercises for the corpsmen and nurses alike. It was quite a sight for the shipyard workers and cynical navy men to see nurses and corpsmen, dressed in their whites, doing knee bends on the limited deck space, or trying to find space to play badminton. E.O.'s dances were the most popular of the recreational exercises. He'd stocked the quarters with the newest and all the old favorite discs. He'd even managed to have a record player mounted on gimbals so that, at least theoretically, it would be able to play as the ship pitched and rolled.

Liz was in her tiny cubicle of an office when the last of the surgical staff arrived. It was E.O. who brought the new doctor in. She rose, introduced herself. He was a tall, unsmiling man with a brush of black hair protruding from under his hat. He held the rank of full lieutenant, same as her. His uniform showed signs of hard and fast travel.

"Do I report to you or what?" he asked. He looked a bit tired.

"To the chief medical officer, Dr. Oliver. Commander Oliver."

"Fine. Think it would be all right if I go to my quarters and clean up first?"

"I think I'd report in first," she said.

"Does what you think really matter?" he asked.

She made allowances for his tiredness. "As a matter of fact, no," she said. "That will be between you and Commander Oliver. You asked for advice, I gave it."

"Tell this boy to show me to my quarters," he said.

"This is a man, Lieutenant," she said, "not a boy. And it would be helpful if I knew your name."

He allowed himself a grin. "Sorry. Nicolas Carew. Nick to my friends. In spite of my surliness, I hope you'll be one of them."

"Well, now," she said, with a smile. "That is much better. But I'm going to risk raising your ire. If I were you I'd delay reporting to the commander long enough for a trip to the ship's barber."

"Oh, one of those, huh?"

"Navy through and through, but a good doctor, at least by reputation."

"Okay. Advice received and noted. Lead on, my man."

E.O. did a little jitter-bug step and led Carew out of the office, Liz shaking her head behind them. Later, as she did with all the doctors, Liz looked over his service record. Carew was a Louisianian, and he had good credentials. Tulane Medical School, intern in New Orleans, residency and specialty training, surgery, at Johns Hopkins. Impressed, she saw to it that he was assigned to the operating suite that would be her primary work area.

The *Solicitude* steamed out of the Golden Gate and made a run down the coast to a point off Baia, a short shake-down cruise during which Commander Oliver conducted half a dozen Condition Red alerts. In spite of rumors to the contrary, only one hospital ship had been damaged by enemy action, and that was an Australian ship. But there was always the possibility. Moreover, ships are vulnerable to other hazards, to fire and collision. And no one put anything past the Japs. After all, they had twice bombed the hospital at Little Baguina in the Philippines, killing seventy patients the second time after broadcasting regrets about the first "mistake."

Of all the things which could happen aboard a hospital ship, Condition Red was the most dreaded. It meant that the ship was in danger of sinking, and it was time to hit

the boats. The big problem was how to move patients, some of them in critical condition. The medical crews used volunteer crewmen as patients, struggling with stretchers. Once, in calm seas, they went so far as to launch the lifeboats and transfer the "wounded" down in slings.

As the ship headed northward, E.O. looked forward to one more shopping trip into town. He wanted a copy of Margaret Whiting's "My Ideal" to add to the record library, for what he called "hugging music." He was not to get it, for there was no shore leave, only a stop at a refueling station and then, once again, the ship was heading west, passing under the towering span of the Golden Gate Bridge.

She sailed unescorted, using her oceanliner speed to pound out mile after watery mile, night and day, the stars beginning to look a bit different after a while. The medical crew used the time to sterilize facilities, to familiarize themselves with equipment and procedures, and to dance in the small lounge to E.O.'s record player. The informal dancing sessions served two purposes: they were relaxing, and they served as a means for the nurses and doctors to get acquainted. But there was surprisingly little small talk. It was mostly all shop talk, for each turn of the screws brought the ship nearer Hawaii and, from there, it was anyone's guess.

Liz danced with Nick Carew and talked shop. She was impressed. His entire manner changed when he talked of his work. His shoulders seemed to straighten, to become wider, his voice took on a crispness that belied his slow, southern, Cajun-tainted drawl. And Oliver told her they were lucky to get Carew, that he was a rising star and could have had, in civvy life, any surgical post in any hospital in the United States.

Carew was wryly amusing during unguarded moments, especially when he spoke of his small Louisiana home town, inhabited mostly by Cajuns. He had a million little stories, and he told them in the musical Cajun dialect that had everyone laughing.

It was a good crossing. Much work was accomplished along the way. And then there was Diamond Head. As the ship docked, the nurses, doctors, and corpsmen lined the rail, staring at the mighty warships in the anchorage, feeling the warm Hawaiian sun on their faces. And there unbelievably was Vivia, blond hair shining in the sun,

eyes shaded with her hand, that blaze of a smile, and Liz ran down the gangplank into her arms. They both tried to talk at once, Liz exclaiming what a small war it was, what with running into Vivia everywhere she went.

She had arranged shore leave and was riding, wind in her hair, in Vivia's private jeep to meet a most impressive man for lunch at the senior officers' mess. Liz saw quickly that there was something between Admiral William Partier and her sister, and she was astounded. Vivia was the last girl she'd have figured to fall for an older man, but, although she was concerned, she soon saw that Bill Partier was quite a fellow. She went off alone with Vivia, after lunch, with growing wonder and a feeling that Partier might just be the best thing that had ever happened to her sister.

Partier had said, "Don't speak of it, Liz, but if you two want to do some talking, run along and do it now because you won't be here that long."

Vivia was full of life, as always, chattering on about her Bill, her work, all the things she'd seen and done in Hawaii, now and then stopping to listen as Liz quietly talked of life on the northern island, of the terrible work after the invasion of Attu. Vivia hinted that she too did not have much longer to stay in Hawaii.

Liz returned to the ship after midnight and found corpsmen loading convalescent wounded. Before the end of the next day they were steaming eastward, their destination the hospitals of the San Francisco bay area. These men would face months, even years, of corrective plastic surgery, of being fitted with artificial limbs. So now there was work to do. Nick Carew was interested in a new technique called bridging, developed in combat, which consisted of grafting a section of vein, often taken from a cadaver, into a severed artery. It worked well. A segment of vein was pulled through two tubes made of Vitalium, a section of the vein exposed in the middle, the ends of the vein turned back over the ends of the metal tubes and connected into the living artery. Discussing the technique with Liz, Carew was his "doctor" personality, serious, his accent diminished, his eyes intent.

"A lot of new techniques will come out of the war," he said. "War is instant advance in many fields, medicine among them. It may sound cynical, but if a badly wounded man is going to die anyhow, what's to be lost by

trying some new technique? If you're lucky, you save his life. And if it works, like the bridge, you'll save more lives in the future."

"I don't like it," she said. "Experimenting on living men."

"There are a lot of things I don't like," Nick said. "You should have been sitting in on our last doctors' meeting. Oliver hit us with a blivet. You won't find it written down anywhere, but standing orders are that under combat conditions a surgeon takes only those cases with a chance to live."

"Oh, no!"

"It's hard. It will be damned hard. I don't know if I can do it. It's against all I've been taught, against all my instincts. But it makes sense. If you've got wounded coming in by the hundreds you just can't waste time doing the humane thing for a dying man. You'd be leaving others with a far greater chance to make it to worsen, perhaps to die, for lack of immediate care."

"Damn this war," she said.

"There is good even from the bad, from the terrible, from the unacceptable," he said. "We're already making fantastic advances in fitting artificial limbs to stumps, connecting them into the living muscles so they function as realistically as possible. Do you know that the navy has its own artificial leg factory? I took a tour of the Mare Island facility before I reported for duty. They had some of the Guadalcanal men there, already moving around on artificial legs. I watched them fit one to a new man. When he first started trying to walk he was in pain, hobbling along, and a man with two artificial feet yelled at him, 'Hey, gyrene, you walk like a goddamned cripple!' They were growing new thumbs there."

"I've heard of that," she said.

"It's done by growing a pedicle on the abdomen, a fleshy roll of skin. You graft the hand to the pedicle and let it grow to connect, then cut it loose. Later insert a section of rib bone, and you've got a new thumb. It won't bend, but it's a lot better than no thumb."

So it was all business and shop talk and caring for men who, some without arms and legs, still considered themselves the lucky ones. They were going home. All of them had buddies who had gone home in boxes.

Once more the *Solicitude* made the crossing at speed,

spent a day loading wounded in Hawaii, took them to the stateside hospitals, headed back into the Pacific with summer behind, autumn in full sway in the United States. Mail had caught up with Liz in San Francisco, letters from both Vivia and Mark, both "somewhere in the Pacific."

They all expected nothing more exciting than another ferry trip, and the highly trained surgeons and the surgical nurses were beginning to question the wisdom of the War Department, assigning an overqualified crew to ferry duty for men who had already been treated. But it was to be different now. At Pearl Harbor, in the early days of November, they stayed only overnight, and not at the patient loading dock but alongside a fueling station. There were no shore leaves, and dawn saw them headed westward, empty of patients.

NINE

VIVIA could only conclude that Lynn Briefer was being very, very strange. As predicted by her own admiral, orders came for the Downs Camp Show unit shortly, after Vivia's brief reunion with her sister. Once again, they were being loaded by small boats into the long-range flying boats. Their course was southwest, and the first stop was the American island of Palmyra, where they refueled and gave a shortened performance for the troops there.

Lynn had made a point of avoiding Vivia, climbing onto the other PBY with some men from the band. From the time of Terry Adams's sudden departure from Hawaii, Lynn had spoken to Vivia only in the line of work, and Vivia sadly realized that she would have to room with one of the other girls.

Palmyra wasn't much. Remembering Bill's remarks about how boring it was for men to be stationed in such a place, far from the war, in touch with the world only through passing ships and aircraft that landed to refuel, she did her best. Her best brought howls of approval from the audience and she embellished things a bit by talking between her songs, feeling confident, capable, loving.

"Do you know where I first heard that song?" she

asked, clinging to the tall upright mike, beaming out at the upturned faces. "When I was a kid in high school."

"Last year, wasn't it?" a voice called out. She laughed.

"That's all right," she retorted. "A lot of you were high school seniors a year ago too. But I was at the little soda shop down the street from the high school and they'd just put in a new selection of records and the boy I was with—"

"Lucky four-F son-of-a-gun," a voice yelled.

"As a matter of fact, he's a paratrooper now," she said, "but he put in a nickle and out it came. Wow. Do you remember where and when you first heard it?"

They seemed to like it and she chatted a little after her next song. Then, flying southwestward again, destination American Samoa, Bob B. Downs stood beside her seat and said, "Look, kid, knock off the shit between numbers." Just like that. She looked up. His face was grim.

"But they liked it," she protested.

"Number one, the show is scripted. You're not supposed to add anything new," he said. "Number two, I'm telling you straight out to knock it off."

Not too long before she had been in the arms of a man with more power and influence than Bob B. Downs would ever have. "Look, it was a short show and it was dragging. I just wanted to put a little something extra into it for those poor guys stuck on that island."

He knelt and put his face close to hers. "I'm gonna spell it out for you, girlie. I'm the fucking star of this fucking show. You're a singer. You're cheesecake. You're legs, tits, ass, and a song. That's all. Get it?"

"Bob," she said sweetly, "do you know what you are? You're a prick, an uncircumcized, chancrous prick." She could, she was telling him, dish out the profanity as well as he could, and she was telling him and herself that she didn't have to take any shit from Bob B. Downs.

His face reddened. He stood, and his words carried all over the passenger section of the aircraft. "If I can't replace you in Australia I'll dump you as soon as I can. And, sweetie, you won't work in this war again. Don't try to get a job in Hollywood, either."

It frightened her a little, and then she told herself that she didn't need Bob B. Downs, that she could get on with another troupe, that she probably had more pull than he with certain members of the armed services. She deliber-

ately did some chatting between songs when they did a hospital show in Samoa, but there was no repetition of the scene after the Palmyra show.

Miles added to miles, the unit island-hopping westward, the Fiji Islands, more wounded for an audience in Efate, and then Australia and New Zealand, one-night or one-day stands. Vivia forgot about her set-to with Downs, became more and more concerned with that dumb Lynn. There was no way, she felt, that Downs would try to get rid of her. He took his orders from the Navy Department and he knew she had some highly placed friends in the navy. Besides, he could see by the audiences' response that you didn't replace Vivia Wilder with just anyone. But Lynn. The girl was ill, or crazy, or something.

Vivia did her best to break through the wall of silence Lynn had thrown up between them, but to all advances Lynn was coldly polite, saying only what was necessary, offering no gesture in return. Lynn was getting mail and any fool could recognize the V-Mail envelopes Lynn eagerly seized and then rushed off to read in privacy. Terry? Well, she thought, if it were Terry writing it meant that he hadn't scored back in Hawaii and was keeping things at a boil in case he ever had another chance at the little dope.

At a Marine training camp in New Zealand, something happened that made her forget Lynn and her troubles for one glorious weekend. It was as if she were reliving a particular moment in her past when, having finished a show, she started toward the mobile dressing room and saw a young officer approaching. With a welling up of questioning, of hope, she recognized Jeff Walters.

"Jeff, oh, Jeff," she cried, running to meet him. He caught her and returned her hug with a grin.

"Hi, Vivia," he said. "Small war, isn't it?"

"But what are you doing here? Is Bill here? Tell me quick, darn you."

"I am here," he said pompously, "upon the orders of Admiral William Partier, to extend to Miss Vivia Wilder an invitation to dine."

She squealed in delight, kissed him on the cheek. "Oh, Jeff, that's wonderful. You're a love. Now? Can you take me to him now?"

He shook his head. "Some pretense of business first, lady. Tonight. I'll pick you up."

To keep from simply bursting with impatience, she busied herself in a complete overhaul, hair wash and curlers, a long and luxurious bath, toenails and fingernails and eyebrows and shaving and perfuming so that, when Jeff did arrive, she was not quite ready. She rushed through the final stages of dressing and joined him in a staff car that he drove himself. She asked him excited questions about what had been going on in Hawaii since she left. He had taken Liz and two of her nurses to dinner in Hawaii, while the *Solicitude* was taking on its second load of casualties. He thought Liz was quite a girl.

"Yes, she is," Vivian said, and then, with a sly smile, "My, my, you haven't fallen for my big sister have you?"

"Maybe I'm just susceptible to the Wilder charm," he said. "Even when it comes in such different packages."

"Hey," Vivian cried, "She'd be great for you. You're both a little bit on the sober side. So serious all the time. You have my permission to court my big sister."

"How generous of you," he said. He changed the subject, talking of how the war effort was really getting into full gear. Men and the weapons of war were pouring through the islands now. Things were going to pick up, and soon.

Their destination was a private cottage on a hill outside Wellington, a hill overlooking the sea. It was dusky as he pulled the car into the turnaround in front of the cottage. He made no effort to get out. "You're not coming in?"

"Two's company," he said.

"Thanks, Jeff," she said. "You're a love."

"I know, you've told me that."

She ran up the pebbled walkway and Bill opened the door. He was in uniform. Behind her she heard the car's engine rev up and fade away and she launched herself into his arms with a laugh. She caught him unprepared and they sprawled together, she atop, seeking his lips with hers. He put his hand under her chin and held her face away from his.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose you are good for me. You have a way of banishing any of my false pretensions to dignity."

"Such big words," she cooed. "Old bear."

And there were no more words for a long time.

Dinner was fresh-caught prawns, tasty potatoes, a

salad that she tossed while he served the food. The evening was lovely. She'd missed him so. It was so good to see him, so fine to be back in his arms, to be fulfilled. She was so content that, at first, she didn't catch his question. They were seated side by side on a couch, his arm around her shoulders, her head leaning against him.

He repeated it. "How do you feel about me, Vivian?"

"I could eat you," she teased.

"Okay," he said, "but really, what do you feel for me?"

"Love," she said.

"All right, let's approach it from another direction. Let's look ahead. Say the war ends in two years. You'll be about twenty-one, right? You'll have been singing for hundreds of thousands of men. You're quite good at what you do, you know. There'll be a future for you. You'll have made fans of many men during your tours, and they'll remember and buy your records or come to see your movies or whatever."

"I'll buy that," she said. "Sounds good."

"And what do I do?"

"You can be my manager."

"Come on now, be serious."

"Okay. I don't know. I haven't thought about it. I guess you have."

"I have," he said simply. "You told me once that you'd, ah, known one other man. Was it a happy or an unhappy experience?"

She was silent for a moment. "Well, it was mostly just sort of sickening."

"Unhappy?"

"Yes, at the time."

"Could it be, Vivian, that after an unhappy experience with a young man of your own age, you find me simply safe and comforting?"

"Well, you're getting pretty deep for me," she said, pulling away so she could look into his face. "I do feel safe and comfortable with you. I have this fantastic feeling that you'd never, never do anything to hurt me. Hey, this is deep, and I don't want to waste the night being stuffy and serious."

"But it is rather serious that I'd make an excuse to come to Australia, leaving a job of some importance."

"Sure," she said. Then, to lighten his mood, she leaned over and kissed him. "You're a fantastic lover."

He laughed. "Experience has its advantages. And, since you mentioned it, there's that too. Now correct me if I'm wrong. It is general for young men to be rather precipitous and . . . once the, ah, objective is obtained . . . to be, ah, rather greedy, in a hurry. It is also rather general that an older man"—he cleared his throat—"not too much older, say . . . a youngish forty-seven . . . has banked his fires a bit. They're still there, mind you, still as hot as ever, but it takes a bit longer to fan them to white heat and thus, a young girl, exposed to a young man of less experience and less patience, less ah, lasting power, might find an interesting contrast between the young and the not-so-young."

She shook her head. "If I followed that, you're saying that an older man makes a better lover. I, from my limited experience, agree."

"And could you mistake simple fulfillment for love?"

She gave the question serious thought. "Level?"

"Level," he said.

"You don't make me all hot and panty, not at first."

"As the young man did."

"Yes," she said. "But once you, as you said, get that fire built up, wow. No, I don't think I mistake good sex for love, but isn't that a part of it?"

"Of course."

"What I think," she said, with an impish smile, "is that the admiral is getting cold feet and is afraid the little girl is going to drag him to the altar."

"Innocent," he said, holding up his hands. "No resistance at all on the admiral's part. It's you, your life, your youth. When I'm sixty you'll be thirty-two. In, as they say, the prime of your life. Much as I'd like to, I just don't think I have the right to ask that of you."

"You'll be a sexy sixty," she said. "Let me worry about that, okay?"

"Okay. Let's move on to another aspect of this interesting discussion. Suppose we assume that we will be married after the war. Would you be willing to give up your singing and become simply the admiral's lady, presiding over his house on the cliffside on Oahu?"

She made a face. "That, sir Bill, is a toughie. One that I choose not to answer, not right now."

"Ah, it's not that you love me less, but you love singing more."

"I don't know, damnit, I quite simply damned frankly don't know. Can't we just leave it for a while? Can't we just enjoy each other and the night and the music and all that jazz?"

"Yes," he said.

It was not until Sunday, with the wonderful weekend almost over, that he became serious again, this time on a different subject. "I thought you might be interested in knowing that your friend Terry Adams has turned into quite a combat pilot."

She felt a little faint for a moment, wondering why he'd brought up Terry.

"Has he now?" she asked.

"I've made it a point to keep up with him," he said. "Two Bettys in one day in a recent raid on Rabaul. Makes five. He's the ace he once claimed to be."

"Good for old Terry," she said.

"I talked with Fletcher, Admiral Fletcher to you, miss. It's no secret that Feltcher's task force is operating around the Solomons. They're in the thick of it, and he specifically thanked me for sending Adams to him. Seems the boy's a natural. A leader. Experienced. Helps his fellow pilots. Tells them how and then shows them how. Already a squadron leader."

Well, what else was there to say? "That's nice. I'm pleased for him."

British soldiers, Australian soldiers, a regiment of British Indian soldiers, Marines, sailors, the army. "I love you, each and every one," she would tell them, blowing kisses, sweeping off the stage. And then, during a boogie routine, Lynn fainted, fell in a little heap, brief costume pulling up to expose the panties underneath. The show stopped only for a few moments until army medics could haul the girl off on a stretcher. Vivia finished. The show must go on, you know. And then she hitched a ride to the army hospital.

"Is she a relative of yours?" asked a stern army doctor.

"A friend. We're with the Bob B. Downs Camp Show. She has no one else."

"Hmmm," he said. "Perhaps you could speak with her. You see, she refuses to submit to an examination. She maintains that she's all right, that she was just overtired from too many shows."

"What are you?" Vivia asked her angrily. "Some kind of fruitcake? Let the doctor look at you, find out what's wrong."

"There is nothing wrong," Lynn said firmly. She turned to look at the doctor. "May I go now?"

"I have no authority over you," he said.

"Thank you. That's nice to know. If you'd just have my clothing brought in."

"The costume you arrived in is hardly street wear," the doctor said stiffly.

"I brought something," Vivia said. "It's in the jeep outside." She went for the small bag she'd packed with Lynn's things, told the GI driver there'd be two passengers for the quarters, asked him to wait. Lynn did seem to be all right.

"Have you ever done that before?" Vivia asked, as Lynn dressed.

"Not in a long time, since I was a kid."

"It's not unusual, though?"

"No, not really," Lynn said. "Thanks for coming after me."

"First cordial word I've had out of you in two months," Vivia said with a smile. "Can I have a few more, please!"

They were alone in the hospital room. "I guess I have been pretty rotten to you," Lynn said.

"Horrid."

"I had reason, Vivia."

"Listen, Lynn, that happened a long time ago, that thing between Terry and me. Listen, I have news of Terry. He's doing real good. He's actually an ace. He's shot down five Jap planes."

"I know," Lynn said.

So, she thought, the letters had been from Terry. She decided not to push her luck. It was such a relief to have Lynn speaking to her again.

"I want to say just one more thing," she said. "Anything I said to you about Terry was the truth and I thought I was doing it for your own good."

"I can see that," Lynn said. "It's just that I was so upset when he had to go away so suddenly."

Vivia pushed. "Well, maybe it was a good thing, Lynn. You know the old saying, absence makes the heart grow fonder. The letters are from Terry, aren't they?"

"Of course."

"Then you've got him hooked, gal. Now hear me through and don't get mad. I still maintain that he was after your body. When he didn't get it, had to go away to combat duty, that just made him want you more. When this is over and he comes back, all you have to do is play it cool and you'll have that marriage license."

Lynn was smiling quietly. "Vivia, you think you're so smart, so mature. You think you have the answer to everything, don't you? Well, listen. Remember when I came home and I was obviously glowing and you wanted to know why and I told you I'd been on the beach drinking champagne?"

"I remember."

"I hadn't been on the beach drinking champagne, not that day. That was a week before that day."

"Oh, God," Vivia said.

"The day I came home obviously glowing was the day we got married," Lynn said.

Stunned, Vivia sat down on the side of the high hospital bed. "Married?"

"For real. With a minister. With a license."

And it was coming back to her. "The night we went to the senior officers' club, and Terry was there. You'd already met him?"

"Yes, a few days before that."

And he'd made the play for her while he was making the same play for Lynn. Good old Terry. Then she was looking at Lynn wonderingly. What was it Lynn had? Why had he married her? The words seemed to bounce around in her brain, emphasizing marriage and what went with it. Lynn had never had the problem Vivia'd had, the problem that ended in an operation and an end, forever, to any concern about. . . .

"You're pregnant," she gasped.

"Sometimes you can be half smart," Lynn said, smiling ruefully.

"You'll have to go home."

"That's it, isn't it? I want to stay as long as I can, complete the tour, if possible. I sneaked off to see a private doctor. Everything's okay. It's just that I want to stay, and you've got to promise me you won't tell."

"Sure," she said. "I promise. But that dancing. All the travel. The baby."

"Exercise is good for me and for the baby. I'll just have

to take it easy when I can, not get overtired again. I want to finish the tour, Vivia. I have no idea where Terry is, but he's out there in the Pacific somewhere. Can you understand that I feel closer to him, being out here myself, even if he is hundreds or thousands of miles away?"

"A thousand or so," Vivia said. "He's with Admiral Fletcher's task force around the Solomon Islands. That's secret."

"Oh," Lynn gasped, sinking down into the one chair in the room. "That's where they're having all those terrible battles."

"Listen," Vivia said. "I talked with a man who knows. Terry's good. He's a squadron leader now."

"He told me that."

"He's good enough so that he'll come through, Lynn. You can be proud of him. Your child, when it's older, can be proud of what both of you did. Don't you worry. I'll pass the word that they're not to let anything happen to him."

"Don't try to get him taken off combat duty, the way you got him put on it," Lynn said.

"You know that?"

"He figured it out. You and the admiral."

"Damn it," Vivia said, "it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been so damned secretive about it. If I'd known he was going to marry you—or had married you. You know what I mean. I did it for you, Lynn."

"Vivia, don't ever do me any more favors, okay?"

"Just a few more. I'm going to keep my eye on you, make sure you eat right, make sure you get your rest."

"Okay."

"Let's go, huh?"

But Lynn was not quite ready, pulling Vivia to a stop at the door. "Listen, you don't have to feel bad about it. He's glad you did what you did. Glad to be out there. He's changed a whole lot. I was just being selfish at first, I guess, thinking only of myself. When I was mad at you, I mean. So don't feel bad, okay?"

Lord only knew how many military installations there were in New Zealand and Australia. Traveling from one to the other, Vivia would have sworn that no one knew, not even the brass. Maybe some of the camps had been built and men put in them and then the whole thing for-

gotten. She was a bit tired of the down-under spring, longed for new and different places, wanted to see Bill again, blamed herself for causing Lynn unhappiness, worried about Lynn's baby and Lynn herself, fretted and mothered Lynn and knew true happiness only when she was onstage and Paul Welton's men were lifting her into the stratosphere with horns and bones and saxes and bass and drums and piano and guitar and the vocal group was clinging to her voice and building it into a sweetness that made men sigh and dream of the girl back in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, or Enigma, Georgia.

She was pleased when word came that they were to be off and flying again, pleased again when their first stop was, gulp, near the combat zones, for Bob B. Downs, intrepid hero, had insisted on making a stop at the newly secured island of Guadalcanal. Hot, steamy hot, bugs, men who looked pale and tired and who perked up when the girls danced out and showed nice legs and sang sweet songs to them and in the heat and rot of the jungle, Bill was there. She saw him standing up front as she felt sweat pouring down her sides underneath the silver lamé dress, as she swirled and swayed between choruses of Johnny Mercer's new hit, "The G.I. Jive." She blew a kiss his way and was inspired for the reprise, "*Rootledetoot, jump in your suit, make a salute.*"

He was waiting for her in the steamy jungle heat when she came off stage. "Thank God," she said. "You've come to take me away from all this."

"Is there a place where we can talk?" he asked, his face serious.

"It ain't the Taj Mahal," she said, "but the Seabees have rigged a dressing room."

Inside was, if anything, hotter than outside. She asked him to wait a moment, had trouble getting the tight dress off her sweaty body, came out into the little sitting room in shorts and halter.

"Did I take you away from your job again?" she asked, going forward, expecting a kiss.

He put his hands on her arms and held her. "I have unpleasant, even tragic news, Vivian," he said.

"Oh, God, not Liz."

"No, no. I came myself because I quite frankly don't know just how this news will affect you, how much it will mean to you."

"Mark? Not Mark?"

"I believe you've answered my question," he said. "It's your friend Terry Adams."

The breath went out of her in an exhalation that slumped her shoulders, her stomach feeling as if she'd been struck. Lynn, Lynn. And flashes of memory. A sunlit beach, a hotel room. Lynn. Oh, God, Lynn.

"He had two more confirmed kills before he went down. It was a major Jap effort, masses of planes after the task force. He got two."

"Are they sure?" she asked, face white, tears beginning.

"Absolutely. His wingman followed him down. He was burning. He went into the water. There was no parachute."

"Ah, goddamn," she moaned, and the sobs followed. Lynn, she had to tell Lynn. *She* had to tell Lynn, because the dumb bastards had been married in secret and Lynn wouldn't be listed as next of kin and she was wailing, falling into Partier's arms.

From somewhere, as if by magic, but actually from his briefcase, he produced a flask of brandy. She gulped it, wiped her eyes. "Sorry," she said. "It hit me hard. Someday I'll tell you why."

"Perhaps now is a good time, Vivia."

"All right, if you want me to. But not this minute. I have something I have to do."

"It can wait," he said, and there was a quality in his voice she'd never heard before, a quality that made him seem a different man, distant, cold, authoritative. "When I saw Lieutenant Adams's name on the casualty list I went to his commanding officer in Pearl and told him that I was sorry. I knew he'd thought a lot of Adams. I said something about being sorry I'd gone over his head to honor Adams's request for combat duty. Do you know what he said, Vivia?"

"I think I do," she said, wondering at the transformation in him, wanting to reach out to him, to tell him that her pain, her hurt, was not for herself but for Lynn.

"He said that as far as he knew Adams had never made a request for transfer, that he seemed to enjoy his work, that he felt he was doing an important job in training other pilots. Is that true, Vivia?"

"Yes, let me explain, Bill."

"I have not finished," he said coldly. "Terry Adams was the young man with whom you had your, to quote you, 'sickening' experience." When she didn't answer immediately he barked, "Right?"

"Yes," she said quickly.

He was moodily silent for a moment. She was too stunned to speak.

"Vivia, in my job I send a lot of young men out to fight, knowing that many of them won't come back. But in my entire life I have never before been used, not to my knowledge, to murder a man for spite."

"Now just a minute," she flared.

"He was a good man, a good sailor. His blood is on your hands." And with that he turned, seized his briefcase, and marched out the door. She leaped after him, calling his name. When he didn't turn, the unfairness of it all hit her.

"Damn you," she screamed after him. "You're just like my father. You didn't give me a chance. You think the worst, without listening, damn you." He was walking away, his back stiff. "And you're as old as my father. Do you hear. Old, old, old."

He halted, turned. There was a little smile on his face.

She wanted to hide in the dressing room forever, not to see anyone, not to have to speak to anyone, but there was still Lynn. Lynn and the other dancing girls had a number right at the end of the show and she'd be along any minute now, with the others, to crowd the little dressing space, to add their body heat to the already overheated cubicles, to chatter and gasp at the heat and talk about the nice fellows they'd met or the boys back home or in the service and she didn't think she could stand it. She went out and walked in the ordered chaos of the installation that was near the airfield for which many men had died, standing aside as big six-wheelers with cargos of war materiel went by, as men saluted passing officers in jeeps and saluted her with greetings, whistles, nice comments about the show. When she figured Lynn would be dressed she went back to their quarters. Lynn was in the room they shared.

"I'm trying to get up enough energy to go down to the bath house," Lynn said. "Wanta go?"

"In a few minutes," Vivia said.

"Hey, why the long face?" She grinned knowingly.

"Didn't I see a tall, good-looking senior officer standing up front during the show?"

"Bill was here," she said. "That's why I have to talk to you, Lynn."

"Hey, anything gone wrong between you two?" There was genuine concern on Lynn's face.

"No, that's not it, Lynn," she said. "Hey, you wanta sit down for a minute?"

"Too blasted hot."

"Just for a minute."

"Well, okay," Lynn said, puzzled. "Honey, if there's anything you want to talk about, I'm a good listener, hear?"

"There is something I have to say, Lynn, and it's hard. Real hard. It's the hardest thing I've ever had to do."

Lynn's face had gone white, her hands clenched on arms of the wooden chair. "No," she whispered. "No, no, no."

"It's true. Oh, my God, it's true."

"Terry?" Her voice was weak, almost a croak.

Vivia stood beside the chair, put her hand on Lynn's head, caressed the damp, dark hair. "I have to say it, Lynn, so that you'll understand. He's dead. He went down and his wingman saw it, followed him all the way to the water. They say he probably didn't know what was happening, that it was quick . . ."

Lynn gave one sustained, wailing scream that growled into subdued moanings, and then she was stiff, her skin gone suddenly chill and clammy as Vivia knelt before her and put her arms around her.

"It couldn't have been any other way," Lynn said. "I knew it from the beginning, you know."

"Oh, darling," Vivia said, tears beginning.

"I knew it just as surely as if it had been written down in a book. I knew when I discovered I was pregnant too. I knew he wouldn't come back."

"At least you have that," Vivia said. "You have a part of him with you, inside you."

"Yes," she said.

"You should be glad," Vivia said. "You at least have that."

"Yes, I have that."

"Listen, honey, I know it must seem like the end of the world." Words. So empty. And yet she felt compelled to

say something, anything, for she was afraid for Lynn, scared silly by the chill of the girl's skin. "Look, I think you should see a doctor. I know this has been a shock. You have the baby to think of."

"Sure," Lynn said.

"You stay right here. I'll go and see what I can do. Like a cool drink or something before I go?"

"No, no, thank you."

"Stay right here. I'll be back with a doc as soon as I can. Maybe he'll give you something to make you feel better, okay?"

"Sure."

Outside a rain was building, a hot breath of moist air preceding it, making it even more sticky. The MP who stood guard outside the visiting officers' quarters where the troupe was housed gave her a flip little salute and a nice smile and cheery greeting. He was a big, young man with a nice face, if a bit jowly. "Great show, Miss Wilder," he said.

"My friend is ill," she told him. "She needs a doctor."

"Sickbay's just across the runway," the MP said. "You'll find the sawbones over there."

"Could you go, or call?"

"I can't leave my post, or I'd be glad to." He looked around. Down the little makeshift street, which was ankle deep in mud, a PFC lounged in a parked jeep, his feet up on the hood atop the folded windscreen. The MP whistled and motioned. The PFC climbed lazily out of the jeep and walked gingerly through the mud.

"We got us an emergency," the MP said. "This lady needs a doctor for her friend, one of the show gals. How about you run her over to sickbay?"

"The captain'd skin me if I took off," the PFC said.

"I'll give him the scoop. Just get moving, huh?"

Vivia waded in mud, got her shoes messed up. The jeep growled into motion, waited for a B-17 to take off, took a shortcut across the runway. Soon Vivia was explaining her problem to an army nurse. A tired-faced doctor accompanied her in the jeep on the return trip. The shower was coming closer, fat drops hitting her on the face.

Lynn was lying on the bed face down. "Honey, I brought a doctor," Vivia said.

Lynn sat up, face pale. "I don't need a doctor."

"While he's here, just let him look at you," Vivia said.

"I'm fine," Lynn protested as the doctor approached. "I've just had a bad shock, that's all."

But she was not all right. She flushed suddenly and there was a look of panic on her face. Without a word she rose quickly and ran to the bathroom. There was a sound of retching.

"Does that happen often?" the doctor asked when she came out, even more white-faced.

"I've had a shock," Lynn repeated.

"Perhaps a light sedative, then," the doctor suggested.

Lynn looked at Vivia with protest on her face, but the doctor was rummaging in his bag. "A bit of rest," he said. "It won't cure what ails you, but it will make it bearable for a while."

"No," Lynn said.

The doctor put his hands on her shoulders. "Now you just sit," he ordered. He probed under a breast and on Lynn's back with his stethoscope, looked down her throat. "Had a good meal lately?"

"She's been having a bit of trouble," Vivia said.

"Keeping food down?" the doctor asked.

"Just a stomach bug," Lynn said.

"You could call it that," the doctor said drily. "How long now?"

"Oh, a week," Lynn said.

"You don't have sickness after just a week," he said, looking at her with a smile.

Lynn glared at Vivia, who shook her head, mouthing, "I didn't tell."

"How long?" the doctor asked again.

"Two months, damnit," Lynn said.

"Young lady, the Pacific isn't the healthiest place in the world."

"I'll be all right," Lynn said. "Please don't say anything."

"Not my responsibility to say anything," he said. "But my advice is this: go home. Put yourself in the care of your family physician."

"I can't, not just yet," Lynn said.

"There are a dozen things out here to complicate a pregnancy," the doctor said. "I won't even list them. But you have something to think about other than yourself now. You have a baby to consider." He gave her a small vial of pills. "These are mild. Won't hurt the child. Take

one with a glass of water and have a nice sleep, then think things over."

"I swear I didn't tell," Vivia said, when the doctor had gone.

"All right," Lynn said. "All right."

"Lynn, he's right. You should go home."

Lynn looked away. Before Vivia could think of anything else to say she heard male footsteps in the hall, a loud banging on the door, Bob B. Downs's voice. She opened the door. Downs glared at her.

"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" he asked.

"It's Lynn. She's not feeling well," Vivia said in a calm voice, although Downs's tone had angered her.

"Well, you're no damned doctor, you're a singer and you're damned well supposed to be at rehearsal after the show," he said. "This is the last time, Miss Vivia Wilder. The damned last time."

It was too much. First the news of Terry's death, then Bill's unreasonable assumption that she was mourning Terry when she'd been crying for Lynn. "I'll tell you what you can do with your rehearsal," she said coldly. "You can shove it, buster. I don't need it. I'm a pro. A helluva lot more of a pro than you are. I'll be there for the performance. Meanwhile, why don't you go perform an anatomical impossibility on yourself."

There was actually a grin on his face. He seemed to be enjoying this. "Well, well. So you won't be at rehearsal? That's fine. That's just fine. We won't miss you a bit. And we won't miss you at the performance, either. You're through, kid. I just hope to hell you can wrangle transportation home on your own, because you are no longer a member of the Bob B. Downs Camp Show. You dig?"

"I haven't felt so much relief since the laxative worked," Vivia said, pushing him out the door and slamming it in his face. She stood there for a moment, knowing a feeling of loss, of near panic. So many of them, all young and handsome and eager to hear her sing, and now she'd be going home. She raised her head. She'd go home with Lynn, take the girl home where she belonged. She would have done it anyhow, even if Downs had not fired her. She owed Lynn that much. After all, it was because of her that Terry was dead.

"You shouldn't have done that," Lynn said.

"Up his," Vivia said. "We're going home. You and I. We're going home together." Lynn did not protest.

Vivia found Bill Partier preparing to board a navy transport plane. He looked at her coldly. "May I have a moment of your time, Admiral?" she asked. He nodded.

"I have only a moment," he said.

"In private?" she asked. He looked around, indicated an office. Inside he turned and stared at her without speaking. For a moment she felt herself go out to him, wanted to explain, wanted to have him hold her in his arms and tell her things would be all right. But she had her pride. He had assumed the worst about her, had actually accused her of being a murderer. She'd done wrong. Lynn was paying, but she was paying a price too.

"My friend Lynn Briefer was in love with Terry Adams," she said. "She's carrying his baby, and she has to go home. She's quite upset. I'd like you to arrange for me to take her home."

He looked at her in speculation.

"Please help me," she said. "Not for me, for Lynn." So she'd told him, but she had not begged. It was now up to him. He looked at her musingly.

"I'm only asking you to arrange transportation," she said.

"You're leaving the show?"

"I have to. She's my friend."

"Isn't loyalty something new to you?" he asked. She froze inside.

"Perhaps I can get help elsewhere," she said, turning.

"No, wait. I'll fix it up." He seemed to be waiting, waiting for something, waiting for her to speak. For a long moment she met his eyes, then she turned.

"Thank you, Admiral," she said, very formally.

They sat on small canvas jumpseats in the belly of a B-17. Lynn had not yet wept. The men of the crew were solicitous, offering coffee, asking if there was anything they could do. The word had spread that the little dancer's man had been killed. Lynn accepted coffee, drank it in silence. The plane droned eastward. The hours passed with agonizing slowness. Lynn was still silent, although Vivia tried to take her mind off things by pointing out an island below, a pretty cloud formation.

Finally she too was silent. It wasn't all her fault. Terry had set the stage for it with his coldblooded seduc-

tion of a little high school girl. Lynn had contributed by keeping her affair, or her marriage, a secret. Somehow Vivia could not believe that they were married, would not believe it until she saw the license. And that meant that Lynn's troubles might be just beginning, that she was going home with a bastard in her stomach. Damn, it would have been so easy if Lynn had told her. Then she wouldn't have asked the admiral to ship Terry off to war. She would have wiped him off her slate and he'd still be in Hawaii training pilots and Lynn could put him through a shotgun wedding and things would be fine.

Well, she'd tried to make it clear to Lynn how sorry she was. If the girl didn't want to forgive, to hell with it. She'd do her duty and see Lynn home.

Hawaii, and a brief stay, long enough to get some sleep. Then a clipper. Lynn was still moody as they waited for the plane to be readied. They were almost on board when she heard an engine cough, and then they were told the flight would be delayed. Waiting, waiting. After a couple of hours of waiting they were told that the ship would have to undergo major repairs, would not leave until at least the following day.

Vivia asked Lynn if she'd like to go into the city. Lynn said she'd rather have another good sleep. Vivia could not face the small room, Lynn's moodiness. She saw Lynn to their quarters and then left her. Luckily, Jeff Walters was in his office. He met her in front of the transient quarters and took her to a nearby officers' club.

"It isn't important," she said, "but I'd like to know. Can you help me?" Good old Jeff. He would. She gave him an approximate date. She stayed in the officers' club for a long while, and then he was back.

"I put some of the boys in the office to work on it," he said. "We had a problem at first because they didn't get married in Honolulu, but we finally tracked it down. It's legal. In fact the paperwork is going through now on her allotment. And he'd changed his G.I. insurance to make her the beneficiary."

"Thank God," she said, feeling guilty anew for having doubted Lynn's word. She was pleased, for Lynn's sake, but somehow it made everything worse for Vivia. She'd killed him. She'd tried to save Lynn from her own husband and she had him sent off to die.

"Lady," Jeff said, "I can offer a nice quiet dinner if that would put a smile back on that pretty face."

"Thanks, Jeff, you're a love."

"You're always saying that."

"But I'm pooped. Thanks for offering, but I'd be poor company."

"Okay. I understand. You're going all the way home with Lynn?"

"Yes. Poor kid." Poor Vivia? Who would go home with her?

"Then what?" he asked. "Back to the troupe?"

She smiled for the first time in a long time. "I don't think they'd have me."

"What do you mean? Vivia Wilder is the sweetheart of the Pacific. Of course they'll have you."

She shook her head. "Not Mr. Bob B. Downs," she said.

"Well, you'll go with another troupe then. We'll miss you out here. Get back as soon as you can."

"I'm going to try," she said.

"You and Downs have problems?"

"You can say that."

He took her hand. "Look, if there's any problem—" He grinned. "There won't be. Any troupe will fight to get Vivia Wilder. But if there is, you just call me at the admiral's headquarters. Okay?"

"You bet," she said. "That makes me feel better."

Lynn cried for the first time late at night, with the clipper closing on San Francisco bay. She let it come out in gasping, heaving sobs and Vivia held her closely, whispering empty words of comfort, feeling hot tears come into her own eyes. She didn't remember what she had said, but suddenly Lynn was wiping her tears.

"No, no," Lynn said, "you mustn't blame yourself."

"But I didn't know," Vivia said. "I thought he was—"

"Yes, I know. I should have told you."

"I had him sent into combat."

"It's all right," Lynn said, the tables turned, Lynn finding herself offering comfort. She took an envelope from her purse. "I think you should read this."

In the dim light she recognized Terry's handwriting. At first the letter was just mushy and rather flowery. There was nothing there to make her feel better. Then he was writing about life aboard a carrier and about being a squadron leader, about his men. Was this the Terry she

had known? No, definitely not. And especially not when he wrote:

Your own personal hero, the great Terry Adams, is now an authentic ace. Number five today. You know, honey, I still get a little scared when I'm going out on a sortie, and with good reason. The Jap pilots are good and the Zero can fly rings around the good old F4F, but we're better. More and more I'm coming to the conclusion that Vivia did me a favor by having the admiral ship me out to fight. I can see now just how sick I was in my mind, scared silly, terrified of being put on combat duty. But I've found out that it's my meat, baby. I'm a member of a very exclusive club. Member of Combat Navy Pilots Ltd. Limited to a very few fine men who can cut the work. For the first time in my life I can look my fellow officers in the eye and think, hey, buddy, we're in this together. Let's do it together and do it right and get it over with. And one more thing about Vivia. This comes hard, honey, but I think you'll understand. I want to get this one last thing off my chest. She didn't yell rape and try to force me to marry her. I lied about that. It's not very admirable, but I found a silly little high school girl and I had her. As I look back, I think of all the not-too-admirable things I've done in my life. As a matter of fact, I had the same thing in mind when I started feeding you a line. Vivia had good reason to warn you about me. It wasn't until after that day on the beach that I knew the old trapper had been trapped, that the great ladies' man had, at last, been hooked and hooked good. I fell in love with you that day, Lynn, and I'm so very glad that you fell in love with me.

She handed the letter back to Lynn, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "Thanks," she said.

She did not let her family know that she had passed through San Francisco. She did not want complications. She had a duty to do. The trip across country was long, tedious. She said her good-byes to Lynn in a small mountain town in north Georgia. They had attended Sunday church services with Lynn's parents, and her bus was almost due. There was a chilly wind blowing down from the Smokies. A funeral was underway in the churchyard as

they stood in the weak, winter sun, trying to think of things to say. A coffin was carried by six soldiers in dress uniform. A bugle blew Taps. The honor guard fired the traditional volley of blank shots into the lowering sky as the sun hid itself behind clouds.

"Did you know him?" Vivia asked.

"I grew up with him," Lynn said. "He's not the first. We've lost six already in this town."

The funeral added an inner chill to the outer cold. She felt the need to be on her way and felt, too, that the dead soldier was not the only casualty present on that sad, damp, cold day. Lynn Briefer was a walking wounded.

She said good-bye to Lynn's parents. "Told her when she left that she shouldn't monkey around with that show business," her father said once again. He'd said it at least a dozen times in the single evening she'd spent in Lynn's house.

Aboard the bus, standing because servicemen crowded every available seat, she watched the passage of cold, red clay hills. Later, as she dozed on a hard bench while waiting for a train, she seemed to hear Jeff's voice. "What will you do?"

She wanted nothing more than to be able to sleep for about fourteen hours. Hateful, the way things had gone, taking her away from the only thing of any meaning in her life. The singing. Yes, her singing. She had that, would always have it. Vivia Wilder was a singer.

If only she had stuck with her singing, instead of meddling in something best left alone. If only Lynn had told her that she'd married Terry in secret. If—if—if.

From somewhere in the terminal a juke box was playing Saturday night music, Artie Shaw's Gramercy Five, Johnny Guarneri on harpsichord, of all things, Nick Fatool's crisp drums—gee, for a chance to work with a drummer like that—Billy Butterfield's mellow, swinging trumpet and Artie. He could flat play. Sexiest clarinet in the world. No one ever came close to Artie when it came to putting emotion into a clarinet. Boy, wouldn't her voice go well with that, the most inspired, tightest, biggest sounding little group of them all. Although her specialty was the ballad, she was great on upbeat things too.

"Mornings we will say good-bye, at evening say hello." Put just a hint of Helen O'Connell cuteness into it, but still be Vivia, all Vivia.

More music, same group. A nice slow bounce on "Cross Your Heart." She and old E.O. had sure put a lot of nickels into the juke box for that one, because it was just right for camel walking. Damned cowards had backed out on their promise to camel walk across the stage to get their diplomas. She should have done it alone. Broke her heart to think that the moment would never come again, that she'd never have the chance to swivel-hip and flat-foot it across the stage while Miss Prudence fainted and the kids in the audience yelled. An audience.

She could see them in her mind, thousands of them, seated, sprawled, kneeling, standing, faces all turned up toward her. "God, I do love you, each and every one of you."

She was a singer and she'd go back to them. Before train time she went to the Western Union office and sent a wire to Abe Having, USO Camp Shows, Inc., Hollywood. EAGER TO REJOIN TROUPE. ADVISE SOONEST.

It was sad that Terry was dead, sad for Lynn to be back in that crummy little north Georgia town waiting to swell up with a baby. Vivia Wilder had other duties. There were thousands of them out there wanting a smile from a girl, a song, a word from home.

A train, servicemen, singing. A few of them had seen her *out there*. They'd be going back. She'd be going back. She never doubted that for a moment. Hell, she could patch things up with Bob B. Downs, the damned swelled head. Simple, just simper a little and tell him how great he was. Nothing to it.

During another layover she walked, found a newsstand with a copy of the new *Saturday Evening Post*. She bought a copy, smiled at a friendly sailor and brushed him off, sat down to read. She could not concentrate. What if Bob B. Downs would not take her back? Well, there was always another troupe, and there was always good old Jeff to help if Downs did have enough pull with the USO to make things rough for her. She looked around. There were newspapers on the stand with black, glaring headlines. The Marines were hitting another island. She didn't even know how to pronounce it, had no idea where it was. The paper said in the Gilberts, and that had to be Jap country, because the troupe had not gone near the Gilberts. Well, just another island. It was going to be that way for a long, long time, island after island, the Marines

hitting one after the other until everyone met on the shores of Tokyo Bay and told old Tojo it was time for him to eat a little grass. She wasn't in the mood for grim stuff like casualty figures, didn't want to read the details of the story. It was just another island. It was something the Marines had to do, just as getting back out there was something she had to do. She'd do her part. She'd joke with them and sing to them. Maybe she'd be singing soon for some of the boys who would be wounded at—what was it? *Ta-raw-wa? Tare-a-wah?*

TEN

MARK Fillmore, back with old friends aboard the USS *Maryland*, having watched the 2nd Marine Division practice amphibious landings at Mele Bay, knew that Tarawa was not just another island. He knew that as soon as he was allowed to see the maps. He had known before, never mind how, that the target for the task force known as the Southern Amphibious Force was in the Gilberts. That made sense. The war was almost two years old and the Jap navy and air hardware was being slowly nibbled away, the Japs scoring frequent tactical victories, but paying a terrible price. Japan did not have the huge industrial capacity the United States had, and couldn't replace the ships and planes lost at Midway and the battles around the Solomons. Meanwhile, America's "Arsenal of Democracy" was on an all-out war schedule, turning out the most incredible volume of war materiel the world had ever known.

The Gilberts lay directly in the pathway of one prong of the two-pronged master offensive plan of the Pacific allies. From Australia, MacArthur's projected offensives would slant northwestward through New Guinea toward the Philippines. From the chief U.S. base in the Pacific, the Hawaiian Islands, the other prong of the thrust curved southward to hit the Gilberts, then northwestward through the Central Pacific to branch northward from the Marianas, toward the Jap home islands.

Mark had joined the 2nd Marine Division in New Zealand, where the scars of Guadalcanal were slowly

being obscured by new blood and by boots from United States training camps. He found a few men who remembered him from the Canal, did his share of talking shop about that Fucking Island and how glad everyone was to be off it. But most of the troops' faces were new to him, fresh, young, eager, confident faces.

There were enough vets of that Fucking Island left to give every squad an experienced group of noncoms, and the 2nd had a reputation for being the best damned jungle fighters in the whole damned world.

"Glad to have you aboard, Fillmore," he'd been told back in New Zealand by Colonel Merritt A. Edson, whose 1st Raider Battalion had been given credit for saving a lot of asses on the Canal in September of '42. Edson was a real live hero, with both the Congressional Medal of Honor and the British Distinguished Service Order.

So Mark was back with the Marines. He took quite a bit of flak about that. He didn't think he was Doug MacArthur's favorite war correspondent anymore, because aside from his brief winter of discontent in New Guinea with Mac's forces, he'd been a Marine fan. He'd heard it said, by members of Mac's staff, that Fillmore's mother must have been in the bushes with a Marine. Once a brigadier general asked him why he didn't spend more time with the army, and Mark said, "Well, General, I guess it's because I'm not a fan of Robert E. Lee." He didn't bother to explain, but Mark knew what was coming. They'd had some practice runs at making the equivalent of Pickett's charge at Guadalcanal and Bougainville, but soon, very soon, the Marines were going to find their own Cemetery Ridge, because all the islands wouldn't be like the Canal and Bougainville, not jungly, but rocky and sandy and barren and fortified to the hilt. He had what he sometimes thought was a sick compulsion to be there. He was realistic enough to understand why he was partial to the Marines.

Some men will always seek out the most dangerous conditions. Such men climb mountains that have never been climbed before, freeze their toes off trying to walk to the North or South Pole, race cars at deadly speeds, dive deep into the sea at the risk of fatal bends. He had a little bit of that same need to be the best at whatever he did. By God, if he couldn't be the best, or at least be

in the same ball park with the best, he just wouldn't play. That was the way Mark was.

The Marines were an elite force. They had the best and the roughest training, and that training never stopped, as witness the time out they took from an invasion to practice landings at Mele Bay. And the job the Raiders had done on Tulagi and the Canal, well, look at Edson's medals and read the list of Raiders who'd been decorated.

When Mark saw the maps of the Tarawa Atoll he had a *déjà vu* feeling, as if he were standing there at Gettysburg hearing Lee and Longstreet discussing the advisability of sending Hood's Texans in through the rocks toward Little Round Top. And he assumed the morale of the units was as good, maybe better, than the morale of the ragged, barefooted southerners who told General Lee, looking up confidently into the mouth of the Union guns on the ridge, "We'll be back in time for lunch, General."

"Goddamn, men, we've had the course," said a gunny sergeant when he saw Mark back at the training base in New Zealand. "When Fillmore shows up it means the fucking ball has started to bounce."

They knew him, knew the things he wrote about them, took pride in him. He was more Marine than civvy and some of them had seen him dodge Jap fire on that Fucking Island. And they'd read his dispatches from Bougainville.

"Give us a break," they'd say. "Just a clue."

"I don't know any more than you do," he'd tell them. And they'd laugh, knowing he'd had dinner the night before with Howlin' Mad Smith.

The Raiders were, although the Marine Corps denied it, an elite within an elite, and Mark had his friends there, and some memories of men like Billy Gene Carnes, but he decided not to follow the Raiders on the next one. He'd reserve his choice until he knew the objective and the assignment. Meanwhile, as training got more and more serious, he wrote about the lack of cold beer and the pinup pictures on the barracks wall and the way New Zealand had taken the 2nd to its heart, even to the extent of wedding bells between some Marines and New Zealand girls.

He boarded ship with units of the 2nd on the second day of November, agreeing that the coincidence of

numbers meant good luck, a milk run. They'd be back in Wellington for Christmas, in time for those with sweet-hearts there to buy gifts and have Christmas dinner with their girls' families.

The primary target for the 2nd Division would be the main island of the atoll, codename "Helen" on the Marine maps, "Betio" on Jap maps. For on the tip of this island the Japs had constructed a three-runway, triangular airfield. That was the reason for the most powerful American task force yet gathered in the Pacific. Two reasons in one. First, deny the Japs use of the strips and a forward air base from which attacks on U.S. shipping could be launched. Second, make those same strips available to U.S. planes for attacks to the north on the Marshalls and westward on the Carolines and the huge, seemingly impregnable Jap stronghold on Truk.

Edson, the Raider colonel, 2nd Division Chief of Staff, conducted the press briefing aboard the USS *Maryland*. Mark, already aboard, was joined by other correspondents from various ships to hear Edson explain how the V Amphib Corps had been set up under the command of Howlin' Mad Smith especially to reduce the Gilberts. For the Tarawa operation, two full divisions were to be used. General Holland M. Smith was in overall command, General Julian C. Smith was 2nd Division commander, and the Army's 27th Infantry was under still another Smith, General Ralph Smith.

"The 27th is not blooded yet," Edson explained, "so they've been assigned to take Makin. The 2nd has its experience on the Canal. Lucky them, they get Tarawa—Helen, to be specific. We'll have units of the 6th and 8th Marines in support. Main assault will be the job of the two and three battalions of the 2nd Marines."

"How long do you think it will take?" a correspondent asked.

"All right," Edson said. "We're hitting them already. We've been getting carrier strikes through the Gilberts and the Marshalls since November thirteenth. B-24's from the 7th Air Force have clobbered Tarawa. And we'll have the big boys, the battleships and the cruisers, hitting them hard before we go in."

"Won't be any live Japs left," said the correspondent.

"They're surprising people, these nips," Edson said. "Some of our people feel the same way. Some of the bat-

talion commanders are saying we'll have it done in three hours." He looked down at his feet. "It might just take a little longer than that."

The announcement to the men came only as confirmation, for the grapevine had been working. Word had leaked on the second day after boarding ship, and although some of the men didn't know the pronunciation of the place and had only a vague idea of its geographical location, they knew that the 2nd was to hit an island called Helen.

Mark wasn't particularly superstitious but because the men were noting the coincidence in twos, he took it one step further. He found Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Amey, commanding the 2nd Battalion, and asked permission to attach himself. Now there were three "twos." The 2nd Battalion was going to hit the beach in an area designated Red 2.

Amey was pleased that Mark had chosen the 2nd Battalion. "You always did know how to find the action." He grinned. "Welcome aboard. We'll try to show you some excitement."

Mark sat in as Amey briefed his officers and noncoms. "You can see from the map," he said, "that Helen is shaped something like a seahorse. In area, it's no bigger than Central Park."

"Let's go take Central Park instead," someone said in a hoarse whisper, and Amey flashed a brief, grim smile.

"We'll be using the Higgins boats and the amphibious tractors. You've all got your boat assignments. Do it just like we did it at Mele Bay. The only difference is that this one gives us only one way to come in. Here." He pointed to a position west of the atoll, moving into a lagoon. The lagoon was protected, on the sea side, by a coral reef. "We'll be going in on a high tide, so the boats and the amphibbs should get us in close."

"What if they don't?" asked a platoon leader.

"If we hit shallow water we get out and walk," Amey said.

"And if we hit deep water?"

"Swim," Amey said.

From the top officers on down, they all had the same superb confidence. They were the best-trained, best-equipped, fightingest bunch of men in the world. At the nearest point, the reef was just under a third of a mile,

the length of five football fields, from the beach. And from the solid coral reef, the bottom extended in varying depths. Intelligence said the Japs had built obstacles in the lagoon itself, barbed wire, mines, log traps.

"How many Japs can we expect, sir?" asked a young platoon leader.

"Not too many," Amey said. "Intelligence says four thousand, but my guess is that a large part of that number are laborers, not Imperial Marines."

"So we're going against Tojo's best," a grizzled gunny said. "'Bout time. We'll show those monkeys what a Marine is."

Amey looked around. "Any questions?" No one spoke. "All right," he said. "We've won the big cigar. We go in first, a little bit in front of two battalion of the 8th, who'll be landing to the east of this long pier here, on our left. Our own 3rd Battalion will be on our right. Hit that fucking beach and keep it moving."

The task force took position by the light of a half moon, so bright that ships cast shadows. In that light, the vastness of the gathering could be appreciated. Some men managed to sleep, in spite of the equatorial heat that seemed never to abate, not even at night. Mark, unable to sleep, stood on deck, seeing the dim outline of islands, the masses of ships. From the direction of the atoll a searchlight probed the moonlit night, failed to find anything, the distance being too great.

The transport began to come to life at midnight, the Marines rolling out to follow orders and dress in clean uniforms, to lessen the chance of infection in the event of a wound. Heat. Stillness. Rustles, whispered orders. Sweaty bodies soiling the fresh battle dress. The low island was a dim mystery in the distance and when general quarters was sounded, just after two A.M.—0215 military time—men peered into the dimness, tense, ready.

"Here we go," someone said, as the transport began to move away from the warships, proceeding toward its assigned position. And then the landing boats were being lowered and the waters were filled with them, milling around in an ordered pattern that was disrupted when it was discovered that the entire transport fleet had stopped in the wrong place, directly in the line of fire

from the warships. Orders flashed out, ships moved, Higgins boats trying to follow.

Mark had scrambled down the landing net to join Amey in an Alligator, the amphibious tractor, a type not yet fully proven in combat but designed to walk over obstacles such as the reef protecting Tarawa, and place the Marines firmly on the beach.

"Son-of-a-bitch," said the Marine at the wheel. "Which one of them is our ship?"

"That one," someone said, pointing.

"I don't think so," Amey said. "I think it's that one over there."

"Goddamned goof-offs," someone muttered. A man vomited and was razzed. The sea was calm. No worthy Marine got seasick in such a sea. Mark suspected it was pure fear, for he was having a little trouble relaxing his sphincters. But an orderliness was gradually wrought from the milling boats and, just after five A.M., the sky was lit by a red flare over the low, dark island. It was as if the Japs took it to be their signal too, for moments later eight-inchers from the superb British guns captured at Singapore began to send white plumes of water into the lightening sky in the area of the convoy. Then, low, thunderous, vibrating in the gut, a battleship opened up to send one-ton missiles toward Helen, and from the low boats and tractors some could see walls of light erupt as the battleships began to move in, closing the range, being closed off from view by the smoke of their own guns, and on the island the first salvo hit a magazine, sending a towering wall of flame high, high, the rumble being carried to the men in the assault craft who cheered each massive explosion.

The island took on an eerie glow as cruisers and destroyers joined in the barrage. Time stood still. Minute after minute, an hour, destruction passed far overhead to roar into flame on Helen. Some of the men had seen the preliminary barrage at the Canal, but the vastness of the ruin raining down on this one small island quieted cheers, sent a feeling of awe through them. H-hour was nearing when word came to hold everything. The amphibians were having trouble getting into position.

0824, November 20. It came and went, with signals being sent to change the jump-off time to 0845, then 0900, and the big naval guns continued to pour high

explosives onto the Central Park-sized island, and planes came in low to add more destruction to the smoking, burning, stricken spit of land.

"What the hell's the snafu?" someone grumbled. "Let's hit it a lick and move out."

A mine sweeper went into the lagoon as the big ships ceased fire, only two destroyers continuing to fire salvo after salvo. The 2nd Battalion's tractors were in position, moving forward through a thick curtain of smoke, the island invisible but there, a gnawing awareness, a threat, an unknown fear.

In Mark's amphib an officer spoke, as he watched the devastation through swirling smoke. "No one could have lived through that." To belie that, up ahead in the first wave an Alligator took a strike, lurched, burned, a man's body was blown into the air, making a short arc before splashing into the sea. And then the air was filled, the unmistakable sound of rounds passing overhead, close, that distinctive cracking sound, machine-gun bullets hitting armor with pinging, ringing hits.

Up ahead, men were dying. From dozens of hidden positions the Japs opened up with antiboat guns, machine guns, with rifle fire from treetops. Two Battalion, in the center, began to catch hell. From the offshore ships, officers peered through binoculars, trying to make sense of the sudden confusion, glimpsed through curtains of smoke the three assault waves being decimated by guns whose existence had not even been guessed at, guns that should not have survived the naval and air punishment, guns that were literally ripping amphibians apart. And they hadn't even reached the reef. When some did, the worth of the amphibians was proven. They crawled over and, in spite of the withering fire from the shore, churned across the shallow water of the lagoon.

"Son-of-a-bitch," Amey yelled, as he saw the condition of the lagoon. "There's supposed to be *water* in there. It's supposed to be fucking high tide."

Amey's tractor had reached the reef, lurched up, hesitated, and the world's biggest drum crashed in Mark's head, the concussion making his ears ring even as the tractor slewed and the engine stopped and the vehicle came to a halt, exposed, still, a firestorm of metal blowing around it.

He knew he would never be able to describe it fit-

tingly. Noise, smoke, yells, the rumblings of the engines. The beach, five hundred yards away, hidden behind a curtain of fire and smoke, and a tractor being visible for a moment, finding a hole in the seawall, Marines piling out to leap forward.

Time had no meaning. There existed only a continually roaring, burning, smoking hell of noise. But already there were amphibs coming back and Amey yelled one down, leading the leap from his own disabled vehicle to the intact one, a white-faced Marine at the wheel yelling at him, "It's bloody murder in there, Colonel."

"Just get us there, son," Amey said.

Mark felt the breath of something, a sinister tug, looked down, after making the leap from one tractor to the other, to see that his left sleeve was bullet-torn, just below the elbow. No blood. He crouched down as the vehicle began to move.

"Hate to ask you to back in there, son," Amey told the driver.

"Well, that's the way the ball bounces, sir," the driver said.

Amey was trying to use his radio, cursed, flung it aside. It was out of action. Salt water. A three-inch shell hit the water close by with a whanging concussion, sending wetting spray over the men crouched down inside. And then they were jerked to a halt again. The tractor's engine roared, struggled. Peering over, Mark saw that they were entangled in a massive stretch of barbed wire.

"Everybody out," Amey yelled, leading the way into the shallow water.

Knee deep, it made movement difficult. It shoaled on the hard coral bed of the lagoon, deepened chest deep just as another series of barbed-wire entanglements appeared dead ahead. The water around the wading group danced white with machine-gun fire. A whumping clang sounded close by Mark as he saw Colonel Amey's helmet jump, saw, as the colonel fell forward, the jagged hole in the tough metal, grabbed Amey's shoulder as he fell limply forward into the water. The hole was in the colonel's forehead. A man cried out and sat down, fighting to keep his head above water, a red stain flowing from him. Two others were hit.

"Over there," an officer yelled, pointing toward a dis-

abled tractor. Mark had to swim the last twenty yards and then he was taking shelter, along with what was left of the men from Amey's tractor, behind the metal sides of the dead Alligator.

He had no idea how long he stayed there. A few men left, trying to wade toward the beach, one or two hit before he lost sight of them. The colonel who had assumed command following Amey's death told them it was time for the rest of them to move. He put his hand on Mark's shoulder. "You stay here. Let us calm it down a little in there and then you can join us."

He felt a bit of shame as he watched them go, but his death, he knew, would serve nothing. He carried no rifle. He had a good view of the beach, through the swirling smoke and the acrid smell of burned gunpowder. And behind him he could see the Higgins boats piling up on the reef. Someone had goofed. There was not enough water in the lagoon to float the boats. Only the amphibious vehicles could make it across the reef, making it necessary for the men in the LCVP's to transfer over to the amphibians while exposed to the fire that swept the reef. All over the lagoon men were wading, sometimes in knee-deep or ankle-deep water, sometimes in neck-deep coming forward.

The few men who had reached the beach were mostly behind a low seawall constructed of coconut tree logs, unable to move inland. Every inch of that terrible, tiny stretch of land seemed to be covered by interlacing Jap fire from dozens, perhaps hundreds of Jap pillboxes and dugouts concealed beneath a protective mound of sand. Impossible, Mark thought, that so many Japanese had survived the most terrible bombardment of the war. But they obviously had, for the high areas of the lagoon were cluttered with silent, still Marine bodies, and in the water wounded struggled to survive, some keeping their heads above water, some sinking quietly. And still they came, wading through five hundred yards, almost a third of a mile of pure, screaming death. And on the beach two tractors moved through a break in the seawall and were halted by shellfire, men diving for cover, the crack of the Marines' M-1 rifles being added to the din. They had a toehold, a toenail hold, and they were hanging on.

He must have been seen. A machine gun traced white

splashes toward the disabled tractor, clanged off metal. A three-incher burst nearby, and the next round was closer. Other amphibbs were coming. He pushed off, holding his breath, swimming into the path of a tractor and a Marine reached far down, caught his hand, hoisted him aboard. He fell in a heap, streaming water.

"Where's Amey?" asked Colonel David Shoup.

"Dead," Mark said. "I don't think there's much left of the 2nd Battallion."

In the tractor with Shoup were Colonel Carlson, of Raider fame, and the regimental surgeon, who asked Mark if he was hit.

"They've got us spotted," Carlson said, as fire began to concentrate on the tractor. "We'd better pull back and get under the cover of the pier." The driver took that as an order. In the incredible noise, the confusion, it was almost impossible to think clearly. From seaward came a wave of LCM's with medium tanks aboard. Shoup told the driver to fall in with the wave of vehicles. An LCM whanged with a direct hit, began to sink immediately, shell fire cracked around the others and around the tractor, and smaller bullets cracked, thudded, whined, as, bent on impact, they screamed off and away.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Shoup said. "Try for a landing on Red Beach Two." But once again the tractor came under heavy fire. The engine stalled. It would not restart. They were a sitting target and men piled out over the sides into the water, waded for the questionable protection of the pier that had, after all, survived the bombardment. It was built solidly of coconut logs and coral. It offered some protection to the men who crouched in the water under it.

"Hell of a place to set up a headquarters," Shoup growled.

Shoup's radioman, having kept his instrument dry and functioning, motioned to him. Mark heard the exchange between Shoup and a 3rd Battalion major on Red Beach 1. The 3rd was under heavy fire, both on the beach and in the water, and had not been able to land all its men.

"Land on Red Two and work westward."

"Sir," the major said, "we have no one left to land. They're all dead or wounded."

"Make this message to General Smith," Shoup ordered.

"We've run into more Jap strongholds than we expected and the situation is in doubt. Tell him we must have the supporting units right now, or we could just lose this fight."

ELEVEN

As the white lady, the *Solicitude*, steamed southward into equatorial heat, there wasn't much time for dancing to E.O. Gardner's record player. No one knew the exact island, but word had been sent down that the ship was to join an invasion force and stand by, close off the beach, to take on wounded. The senior medical officer kept the entire medical force cracking, cleaning, sterilizing, drilling, running through procedures. When they joined the Tarawa armada, Liz thought there couldn't be that many ships in the world: aircraft carriers that, even from a distance, looked to be the size of a small city; a sleek and deadly looking destroyer that cut a swirling wake around the ship, blinking out a greeting with lights, sailors on the rails yelling and waving at the nurses on deck. And that silly Marcie ran up a sexy little nightgown on a signal-flag line where it streamed brightly out in the wind of passage and brought distantly heard cheers from the sailors on the destroyer. The *Solicitude's* captain saw the destroyer signal: NURSES, NURSES. He grinned, did not make them take down the little nightgown. A Hellcat came in low, waggled its wings, made two passes low around the ship, pilot waving gaily, before zooming up with a powerful growl of acceleration.

When the sky lit up with the bombardment, all was in readiness. Even those off duty were on deck to see, in the distance, the smoking, flashing warships and, even more distant, the effects coming in a low rumble of thunder, the bombardment striking the island. Waves of aircraft flew over them, dived to strafe and bomb. They could see the white, circling wakes of the landing craft in position.

"I'll bet he's there," Liz told Nick Carew, as they stood with Marcie and other nurses and doctors and watched the

most impressive, deadly display of fireworks they'd ever seen.

"Your newsman?" Nick asked.

"The Marines are there. That's where he'll be."

"I'd hate to be on that island," E.O. said, as the low land took on a red glow.

It seemed to go on forever and on the hospital ship there fell a silence, an awed quiet broken only by the sounds of the low thunder, the buzz of planes overhead. A picketing destroyer steamed back at flank speed, cut a wide and graceful curve, and from her stern came closer thunder as depth charges arced heavily into the air. Moments later huge, dirty white plumes of water spewed into the air. Another destroyer joined that one, and word came down from the bridge that there were Jap subs about.

"Great God a'mighty," E.O. yelled, as, not more than a half mile away, a grim, deadly, gray shape poked suddenly from the water and a destroyer, horns bleeping, guns beginning to blaze, cut sharply toward the surfacing sub, tilting at a crazy angle until it regained stability and bore down to crash into the sub with a raking, booming, grating roar of impacting metal. It came to a halt suddenly, the sub's hull rent and torn, water rushing through the gaping slash, a few men leaping from the conning tower as the sub went down quickly.

"Look," Nick said quietly, tugging Liz's arm. Boats were being lowered to pick up Jap survivors.

The circling, curving wakes of the landing craft had become straight, parallel lines arrowing toward the island.

"Now hear this, now hear this," the ship's speaker sounded tinnily. "Medical personnel stand by to take on casualties."

But there was time, time to watch the first wave of boats falter, stagger, disappear for long moments in a cloud of smoke and fire at the reef, and Liz felt herself begin to weep quietly, for she knew she was watching men die.

Men took up positions, standing ready to lift the wounded onto the deck by slings rigged along the rails, manning only the starboard side. But it was almost noon before they saw the first approaching Higgins boats. Then one was alongside. A corpsman with blood on his arm, a

bandage bowtied loosely, was holding a piece of canvas over a man who coughed blood. So it began. Scrubbed, ready, Liz accepted the first patient into the operating room—the one coughing blood from a hole in his left lung. She was to assist Nick Carew, who was all doctor, now, Cajun accent gone, all crisp directions, skillful hands moving swiftly, so swiftly. Lights bright, hot. The boy, man, coughed as the anesthesia began to take hold. Liz's response to Carew's orders was automatic and he smiled at her from behind his surgical mask. "We're going to make a good team," he said.

E.O. was in charge of a detail of corpsmen that brought men from the deck into the operating suites, and as boat after boat arrived, the wounded began to stack up. Some had been given morphine by corpsmen on shore or in the boats, some moaned with pain. Nurses and corpsmen sorted the wounded, giving priority to the more seriously wounded.

"They're stacking up outside," E.O. called to them, sticking his head through the operating room door.

"We're having to take them aboard on both sides now." And they were stacking up below decks too, stretchers everywhere, aisles filling, passageways clogged with dripping plasma bottles and equipment. E.O. working skillfully, had to call on a nurse only once during those first hectic hours, to find a vein in a man almost dead from loss of blood.

Wounds had been sprinkled with sulfa powder and some of them were soiled with sand, small grains of coral, mud. A badly burned man showed the outline of his GI skivvies when he was taken into the operating room, stripped of his charred clothing. He was conscious, the screaming pain deadened with morphine. In addition to his burns he had a huge hole in his chest. Nick Carew's eyes caught Liz's, widened. He shook his head.

"Could you please move my legs a little bit?" the wounded man whispered, through bubbles of blood. Liz carefully moved one leg, then the other, as Carew motioned to the corpsmen to remove the man from the operating table.

"Thank y—" He started to say, and his voice ceased, midword. No spasms, no choking cough. The light of life left his eyes, they glazed, and he was dead. But there were too many others. There was no time to weep for

him. A man with an arm missing, blood oozing from the stump through a skillfully applied tourniquet, looked up at Liz and said, "Take him, he's in worse shape than I am." The man behind him had been hit in the face.

A man with one ear gone, shrapnel wounds in chest and arms, asked E.O. for a fag. He leaned on one elbow as he was carried to the treatment rooms.

"Must be rough out there," E.O. said.

"It's hell's little half acre," the Marine said.

The gangplank had been lowered in the calm seas and men were coming aboard by sling and directly up the plank. An unwounded Marine captain leaped from a boat, ran up the gangplank, looked around, saw no officer present. He approached E.O., waiting for a sling to bring up another casualty.

"Who's your commanding officer?" he asked.

"Commander Oliver," E.O. said, "but he's in the operating suite."

"We're losing corpsmen faster than we can send them to the beach," the captain said, "and wounded men are getting shot up again on the way out. We need help, all the help we can get."

"What can we do?" E.O. asked. The sound of battle was in the air, big guns, the continuous roar and smash and crackle of machine guns and rifles.

"Use the ship's Higgins boats, meet the amphibians bringing out wounded at the reef. Who can I talk with about it?"

"I'll take care of it, sir," E.O. said.

"Good man," the captain said, running back to join the departing Higgins boat on which he'd come.

E.O. found a ship's officer and explained. Ship's crew were pressed into service as stretcher-bearers. E.O. organized corpsmen to man the ship's Higgins boats, took the first one himself.

He had to laugh a little as the Higgins boat neared the reef that was cluttered with disabled landing craft, where three-inch shells burst and machine gun fire swept the damp, razor-sharp coral. It was a tittering, nervous laugh that made the sailor at the wheel look at him strangely. He was no coward, E.O., it was just that he wasn't ready for this. He was a corpsman and he'd heard firefights on Attu, but he wasn't quite ready for

this. He was ready, in fact, to dive overboard and swim back to the *Solicitude*.

But there, lying on the reef, bullets plucking at him, a man lay bleeding. "Corpsman," he called weakly, as the Higgins boat came near. They picked him up, the boat taking some small hits, nothing serious, and then an amphib was lumbering over the reef and they got alongside and began transferring men. E.O. lifted a Marine bodily, for fire was beginning to concentrate on them. The Marine jerked in his arms, breathed bubbly moans, having taken a bullet through his chest, shattering bone, coming through to make a little thudding pain on E.O.'s left shoulder. That's the way it felt when you were hit, he thought, looking down, seeing only the blood of the wounded Marine who died as he lowered him into the Higgins. E.O. began to feel around and something heavy fell striking his foot. He picked up the spent slug, found it distorted by impact, grinned nervously, went back to work. He took another tractorload of wounded before heading back toward the ship.

In the operating rooms, sterile procedure was the first casualty. For the first couple of hours patients were scrubbed, cleansed, instruments carefully treated between cases, but as the wounded began to pile up in rooms, passageways, on deck, as the terrible urgency of it began to seize the doctors in their various operating rooms, as it became clear that the flood of wounded coming in over both sides and up the gangplank threatened to overwhelm them, it became more important to work swiftly. Nick Carew took no other shortcuts, however, for once a man was on his table that man had his total and undivided attention.

After the first few hours Liz forgot to glance at the clock on the operating room wall. And the wounds ceased to be individual things, stopped being personal, and took on a sameness . . . head, neck, chest, arms, stomach. They had developed a rhythm. She lost count of the number of men who lay on their table, ceased looking at faces. The opponent was not one wounded man but a flood of torn, ripped, shredded, burned, lacerated, mashed, holed flesh that blended into one terrible entity in her mind.

At one point she saw Marcie Evans turn quickly away and walk to a corner to vomit into a waste can, saw

Marcie clean her face at a scrub-in sink and come back, white-faced.

With the coming of night on the beach, the word was passed to dig in. Mark dug his foxhole as close to the seawall as he could. A foxhole was good protection from small-arms fire, but a direct hit by a mortar and, it was lights out, sweetheart. When it was fully dark he crawled up to Shoup's command post.

"How's it look?" he asked, joining the colonel in a prone position.

"I hope it doesn't look as bad to the Japs as it does to us," Shoup said. "If they guess how bad off we are and come at us during the night, we might not be able to hold."

"Colonel, you know how I feel about the Marine Corps," Mark said. "Just between me and you, what the hell happened?"

Shoup shook his head. A star shell burst high overhead, inland, and a scattering of small-arms fire broke out. "I don't know. We didn't know the pillboxes were here. Damned Japs must have been shipping in concrete for a year. And that was one smart bastard of a Jap engineer who designed the log dugouts. We knew they had guns. Thought they had more. They'd put coconut logs in place to make them look like navy big guns from the air."

"And the tide?" Mark asked. "There was supposed to be water in the lagoon so the boats could take the men all the way to shore."

"Damned if I know," Shoup said. "We knew that the tides here in the equator are erratic. We're right astride the damned equator, you know. But we thought we had the best information possible."

"Couldn't it be, Colonel, that the brass just goofed?" Mark asked.

"Quote me and I'll call you a liar and run you off every Marine installation in the world," Shoup said, "but, yes, the goddamned brass goofed."

And, some little distance away, a staff captain was making himself somewhat of a Marine Corps legend as he told General Howlin' Mad Smith, commander of the whole show, "General, the fucking brass fucking goofed, and, goddamnit, it's the gyrenes who are paying for it."

"What do you want me to do, Bessenger?" Howlin' Mad asked calmly. "Call it off now and leave the men on the beach?"

They held, that first night, about three hundred yards of beach, held it with teeth, guns, bayonets, a courage that made Mark Fillmore remember a quote from Horace: *Gallant heroes lived before Agamemnon, not a few; but on all alike, unwept and unknown, eternal night lies heavy because they lack a sacred poet.*

He did not have the audacity to think of himself as a Homer, but he vowed, that first night, to fight with all his ability against darkness closing over the memory of these men.

Sometime during the hours when some men slept a few fitful minutes the orders came down from Julian Smith on the flagship: Attack at dawn. Reserves will start landing at 0600. And the navy barges got a few more tanks to the reef, from where they chugged ashore to be the most beautiful things the Marines on shore had seen since leaving Wellington's girls.

On board the *Solicitude* Liz was unaware of the coming of night. The bright lights over the tables allowed no hint of the outside darkness, and only the ache in her back, the soreness in her legs and feet, spoke to her of the passage of hours until with a shock, she realized it was after midnight and that Nick Carew had been operating steadily, without a break for more than a hurried sip of water, for over twelve hours. She called a halt and forced him to sit down, have a cigarette, eat a hurried half sandwich, and then they were working again, men still stacked up in the passageways, the wards beginning to fill. Although the night slowed the transportation of wounded from the island there was enough of a backlog to keep them busy until once again, she looked at the clock to see that it was after three. Then it was Nick who insisted that she take a break.

"I'm fine," she said.

"That's an order," he said. "Marcie can take over."

"An hour, then," she said, knowing the most dreadful tiredness of her life. In the hallway she saw a nurse, head bowed, facing a corner, shoulders heaving with sobs. She was one of the ward nurses and, as Liz started toward her, thinking words of comfort and encouragement, the nurse raised a hand, wiped away tears, turned

to smile briefly at Liz before padding back toward her station on white, soft-soled shoes.

She had the cabin to herself, washed her eyes without looking at herself in the mirror over the lav, fell across her lower bunk with a deep sigh, one leg dangling. She barely managed to draw the dangling leg up onto the bed before she was asleep, and then a dog was shaking her as if she were a bone and a corpsman was saying, "Lieutenant, Lieutenant."

She sat up with a groan. They'd lied to her. They had not let her sleep for an hour. She'd barely closed her eyes. But when she looked at her watch it was almost six and she sprang out of bed. Out of habit, she turned to straighten the bed and froze in a semistooped position. The sheet was stained with dried blood, ruined, and as she looked she knew it was not her blood but the blood of many, from her operating room smock. She opened her mouth and let out one scream before straightening, looking the startled corpsman in the eye and saying, "Thank you. Tell the doctor I'll be right there."

Before dawn the flow of wounded had begun to increase, some having been picked up during the night, some of them having been in the water for hours, with the resulting complications.

She found a fresh smock, scrubbed, took Marcie's place and told her to go catch a couple of hours. Nick looked almost as if he'd had a full night's sleep, though he'd really snatched about thirty minutes, lying on the operating table. His skilled hands did not falter.

The flood of wounded during the first hours of daylight was greater than the day before, because the day began with the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, climbing out of the Higgins boats at the reef into machine-gun fire. It punished them all the way to the beach, where the survivors arrived. They had no heavy equipment, only the M-1's they clung to for survival.

Japs had sneaked through the lines during the night and were using the Marines' own weapons against them, raising such indignant anger that there was no lack of willing men to wade out there, get the sons-of-bitches, take no prisoners. Daylight brought a terrible repeat of the day before, of men dying while trying to wade the long, long distance from reef to seawall.

They had been ordered to attack. "Hell, might as

well," said a Marine. "There damned sure ain't no place to hide."

And attack they did, following the historical example of the human race, to advance on the backs of a few outstanding individuals. Brave men, one and two and three at a time, moved forward one perilous yard, then two, taking out a Jap pillbox, then a few more yards. For cover they had fallen trees blasted by the bombardment, and the battle debris made the small beachhead look like hell's junkyard.

Mark was not about to go forward as an unarmed combatant. He carried the M-1 taken from the dead Marine, and he used it, not too skillfully, perhaps, but it gave him a small feeling of security and brought some comments from men who recognized him. It had been a costly battle for the 2nd Battalion, and no man's experience had helped much. Veterans of that Fucking Island, the Canal, were killed as quickly here as the new men were. The 2nd began to move toward the airport. Mark went with them, trailing behind a C Company corporal who'd survived the Canal. B Company had sixty men left, C Company seventy-five, E Company a heart-breakingly scant fifteen, F Company had, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist, with only nine men answering muster. None of them had much ammunition left, and the water was entirely gone. It was damned deadly, still, out in the lagoon. Getting more fighting men on shore was more important than bringing water from the ships.

Heat building up, the acrid smell of the smoke, the incredible noise, it was all an endless part of the same moment in time and the body was so tired that it couldn't *be* any more tired and live. And out in front of C Company a white flag extended from a pillbox. Mark's corporal friend, Matt, started to fire on the lone Japanese at the pillbox's side waving the white flag.

"Don't fire," a sergeant yelled. "The colonel wants prisoners."

A man closer to the pillbox yelled back. "He says he wants to surrender, sir."

"Don't take no chances," the sergeant yelled, crawling forward, yelling to the Jap to come on over. The Jap called back in barely understandable English that there

was a wounded officer inside who also wanted to surrender.

Corporal Matt shouted. "It's a trap, Sarge. They did it to us on the Canal."

"An officer might be able to give some good information to the defenses," Mark said.

"Shit," Matt said, spitting drily. "We can take our own information, with this." He patted his rifle.

"You carry him over," the sergeant yelled.

The Jap with the white flag called that he was too weak, too wounded, and he was, indeed, leaning weakly against the pillbox.

"Two men," the sergeant said. "Go get the Jap bastard."

Three men rose, began to move forward. The Jap in the doorway fell down suddenly and from the darkness within a machine gun erupted. Two men went down as Corporal Matt yelled in rage, leaped to his feet, threw a grenade dead center at the doorway, blowing to bits the body of the white-flag bearer. But out of the smoke of the grenade came Japs, screaming, machine-gun fire coming from all sides.

"Fillmore, get the hell out of here," Matt yelled, firing as fast as he could as the banzai charge rolled forward. Men were cut down by calm Marine fire, rifles and automatic weapons blasting back until, once a hundred strong, the suicide charge rolled into the forward position to turn into a bayonet and knife fight. Mark fired when he had a target, never thought of moving back. As the man said, there was no place to hide. There was no grace about the several fights-to-the-death that individualized themselves, yellow men entangled with white, falling to the sand. Then it was over and C Company claimed its bodies. Having started with seventy-five men, there were twenty-one on their feet to clean up. Of E Company's fifteen men, not one was unwounded.

It was almost midday, the equatorial sun broiling the island, when Mark just happened to remember that he was on the island for a particular purpose. He chuckled. That would just have to wait. He couldn't quite see himself composing a dispatch while lying on his face in a foot-deep foxhole. He crawled back to the command post and found some of the staff officers mad as hell.

"They're sending in the goddamned 6th Marines," said a major.

"Sounds like good news to me," Mark said.

"Damn it," the major said, "those bastards in the 6th are cocky enough already. We'll never hear the last of their having to come in here to save our bacon."

When Mark collapsed weakly, laughing uncontrollably, the major looked at him in disgust and walked away. Even in the midst of this terrible battle, there was that pride. The 6th had won the *fourragère* in World War I and they weren't modest about it, and those who were not entitled to wear the decoration couldn't stand the idea of those cocky 6th bastards having one more thing to brag about.

Slowly, gradually, at the cost of many lives, chaos was changing into order. Shoup had radio communications with most of the units on the island. Two marine companies were in the triangle formed by the airfield's taxi-strips and runways. Supplies were being landed at the end of the long pier. The 6th Regiment began landing and made some progress. It was difficult to comprehend, as Mark listened to reports coming in from the various units, that it was all taking place in an area not more than two and a half miles long and half a mile wide. As he watched the wounded being stacked up, waiting for the stretcher-bearers, he concluded that Tarawa was shaping into a legend. He would not be at all surprised to learn, when all accounts were in, that more blood had been shed per square yard of this island than in any other battle.

He heard Shoup commenting bitterly that, in any action, it was the best who died. The good ones were up front. Even in an outfit like the Marines, there would be men who would manage to linger behind, to let other men make that awful forward dash.

Tired, he was torn between the desire to stay at headquarters, where he could get an overall view, and to rejoin the 2nd Battalion as they continued their yard-by-yard advance. His own exhaustion made the decision, and he sat, head pillowed on his helmet, and slept awhile, waking to find the day lengthening.

There was no night, no day, in the operating rooms of the *Solicitude*. The first day had been terrible enough.

The second was bloody horror. Now the wounds were more varied, for the first day had seen wounded mostly from the lagoon, those who had taken hits in the upper body as they waded through the varying depths of water. Now that the Marines were a bit better organized, land-hit casualties were coming in.

Nick Carew was continuing on caffeine, guts, and a compassion that made him forget his own agonizing tiredness, and seemed to add eyes to his skillful fingers. Liz had had only the three hours' sleep in the early morning, but there was a strength in her engendered by the men themselves. Even the most seriously wounded seemed to accept what had happened, were determined to continue the fight, to overcome. There was an optimism even in the dying which often had her working with tears streaming down her face. She went on and on and on, hours meaningless, work the reality, piecing together men so terribly hurt that it seemed impossible for life to continue. In all the operating rooms there were hourly miracles. In the wards the nurses fought sleeplessness with gallons of coffee.

Again, on that second day, E.O. Gardner ran the *Solicitude's* ferry service, taking the ship's Higgins boats to the reef, to pick up cargo after cargo of wounded. The total grew, even seemed to accelerate as it became possible to move wounded off the island more efficiently. E.O. had decided he was not going to die, that if it had been meant to happen it would have happened the first day. He kept, as a good-luck charm, the spent slug that had passed through a Marine's body and slammed, without breaking skin, into his shoulder. He fingered it on each approach to the fire zone, grinning up at the helmsman.

On battered Betio, night brought a strange silence. The navy ceased its constant shelling and the continual hammer of guns slowed. In the early night, corpsmen tried to bring in the wounded from front areas where some had waited for hours in the broiling sun. And as they worked, they heard from the Jap side of the lines the beginnings of a weird serenade, an exercise in psychological warfare that amused hard-nosed Marines rather than frightening them. The Japs made the sounds of jungle birds, howled like wolves. To those Marines able to find a spot and the time to sleep, the sounds became a lullaby.

Sturdy little jeeps came ashore to haul badly needed supplies and pull up artillery pieces. Mark dug in with James Teague's forward unit, and from the Jap emplacements to the front came the sounds of jungle animals, the chatter of a parrot, the eerie, high scream of a hunting cat. The attack came at midnight, after Teague, still in command, had assigned rotating sleep periods.

"Here we go," a Marine yelled, as the night came alive with small-arms fire. They came out of the darkness, creatures from a nightmare, small, fast-moving, faces glowing with phosphorescent paint, a dozen of them, eager to die, to find paradise, assuming that their show would intimidate, frighten. Instead, the glow made a target and only a few reached the foxhole. These were met with a bayonet in the stomach, or a Marine wrestling partner. Writhing, fighting the life-and-death struggle, Imperial Japanese Marines died. Mark had added an officer's .45 to his arsenal, but as the attack closed in, he could not find a target. The suicide charge rolled up the front line of holes, came close, Teague leaping forward to meet two screaming, glowing-faced apparitions, one going down with a crack as Teague's rifle butt burst his head, the other closing in, long knife glinting in the dark.

Teague positioned himself quickly and, just as he'd practiced it so many times on the bayonet course, crouched, let the Jap run into the blade, lunged, the forward momentum of the Jap impaling him, but the weight pushed back Teague's outstretched arms, the hand made a wild slash, and then they were both down and Mark ran to Teague, found him bubbling grotesquely, his life rushing out through the severed carotid artery. Mark pressed his finger down, trying to stop the flow of blood, and Teague's hands came up to seize his wrist with an almost gentle strength.

"Corpsman, corpsman," Mark screamed, not recognizing his own voice.

His hands were wet with the hot, sticky flow. A Marine crawled to his side.

"No corpsmen up here. Most of 'em been hit already."

The hands on his wrist relaxed. The bubbling weezing became a choking sound and then Mark was sitting flat on the ground, his hands wet, wiping them on his fatigues.

"Get away," he told the Marine who was still by his side. "Get away from me, goddamnit."

"Take it easy, boy," the Marine said. "We don't want no shell-shocked newsman around here. You just take it easy."

"Get the hell away," Mark said, his voice calm, low. "I'm bad luck. I kill them all." And he was remembering Billy Gene Carnes on the Canal, Colonel Amey on the way in, all the men he'd watched die in New Guinea and on Bougainville and he began to push the Marine.

"Go on, get the hell away. I mean it. Go on."

"Maybe you'd better go on back to headquarters," the Marine said, edging backward, eyes gleaming in the darkness. "Just take it easy."

He heard the sound of an aircraft engine and crawled back to his hole, huddled in it, clutching the rifle of a dead Marine, eyes strained into the black sky as the plane roared over low and dumped a stick of bombs, most of which fell on Jap-held ground, only two in Marine territory.

"Bless you, my son," someone called out to the Jap who had, unwittingly, helped.

He found his way, on the third day on Betio to Shoup's headquarters. The news was good. Elements of the 2nd's 1st and 2nd battalions were all the way across the island to the south shore. A battalion of the 6th was on the west end. The Raider colonel, Edson, was ashore and was assuming overall command. The navy was pounding the eastern end of the island once again. From a half mile offshore the battleships fired almost point blank and the carrier bombers came in waves.

Not willing to be a Jonah to another man, not another single man, Mark stayed with the headquarters group, borrowed paper and pencil and sent his first, brief, unemotional dispatch out to the flagship with an officer. Two hundred carrier planes blasted the tail of the island, the last Jap strongpoint. Marines, always willing to seize an opportunity, were catching Jap chickens and ducks and, in quieter areas, fires burned and chicken fat sizzled and the aroma of cooking meat mixed with the permeating stench of the dead, some of whom had lain under the tropical sun for two days.

Major General Julian C. Smith moved his headquarters from the *Maryland* to the beach and Mark tagged along as Smith made a tour of inspection. In one shell hole

they saw the bodies of half a dozen dead Japanese wearing U.S. uniforms, proof of the continuing rumor that the Japs had disguised themselves to get close enough to kill.

And still it was not over as, for the third time, the Marines made ready for night. The word was passed. The tide of battle had definitely turned and, if the Jap was true to form, he would end it that night in the sort of suicide charge that the Marines had learned to expect. They came, not once but three times, during that third night, screaming, closing to fight with bayonet and knife, rushing into the mortar fire or the machine guns, even the ship-to-shore blastings of two destroyers. Seventy-five Marines died with them, and the flow of wounded toward the hospital ship continued.

With the dawn of the fourth day, units watched another hammering of the eastern end of the island. When the barrage was over, not a tree was left intact. And from that area of incredible devastation the Japs rose as if from the dead, popping their heads out of holes, taking up the fight from the log and sand strongholds that had survived direct hits from naval cannon. Flame throwers and TNT and grenades and rifles and machine guns and grim Marines, taught the hard way, were not taking any prisoners.

The dead, both Marines and Japanese, were becoming a problem. Bulldozers began to dig trenches for the Japanese. Each unit was ordered to gather its own dead. They went into carefully marked graves, for the dead would later be moved to American soil. It was quiet. There was only intermittent fire as mop-up teams cleaned out an occasional undiscovered hole. There was now food and water, time for sleep, if you could sleep in the continuing steamy heat. Time to look back and wonder why you were still alive when so many you knew weren't. Time to indulge in that age-old hobby of the lower-rank fighting man, questioning the intelligence of the brass.

"Ole Tojo said a million Marines couldn't take this fucking island in a million years. We took it in four days."

"Yeah, but what have we got? Shit, this is just an outpost. They put it here just to see how many Marines they could kill. They figured all along to lose it, but they wanted to see how much damage they could do."

"They did enough for me."

Darkness. Quiet. Until a mop-up man threw a thermite grenade into what he thought was a Jap dugout and set off a huge magazine of five-inch shells. They kept exploding throughout the night.

TWELVE

It became necessary to sleep, impossible to continue without sleep. With an hour snatched here and there, the doctors of the *Solicitude* had been on their feet, operating continuously, for seventy-two hours. The nurses had fared little better. The bloody flow of wounded began to lessen and there was even time to go back and make some necessary repairs on operations performed earlier.

Liz moved as if in a fog, on that fourth day, as the islands in the distance gradually quieted, and now she had a moment to take stock. All the wards were full. Men lined the passageways on makeshift beds. There had been so much blood, there seemed to be a red tinge to everything. The floor of the operating room was slick with it, reeked of it, and in those last hours an exhausted E.O. Gardner came into the room. He'd taken a piece of shrapnel in the left shoulder, a small piece that did not penetrate deeply, had been treated quickly and efficiently by the senior medical officer and continued his duty. Relieved of the need to run the ferry service to the reef, he took over his post as Liz and Nick's right-hand man and, on his hands and knees on the operating room floor, a scrub bucket by his side half filled with a grisly, thick, reeking red, E.O. was weeping quietly when Liz noticed him, crawling along on his reddened knees, mopping with a towel, wringing it out over the bucket.

"I can't get it cleaned up," he was saying over and over. "I can't get it all up."

Commander Oliver, reeling with exhaustion, came into the room as Nick finished tying off the severed arteries in the stump of a man's leg.

"When you finish there," Oliver said, "take a break, get some sleep."

Nick opened his mouth to protest.

"That's an order," Oliver said. "We'll do it by rotation. You have six hours."

Nick finished the job and the patient was carried away. He jerked down his mask, splattered by blood and his own perspiration. His face was ash white, his eyes red-rimmed. He stood for a moment, arms hanging slackly, gave a deep, gusty sigh. Liz leaned one hip against the operating table, too exhausted to move. And then they went, without a word, into the scrub room, washed up, removed the soiled operating room smocks.

He followed her into the passageway. At the door to her quarters she paused, turned. She'd been with him for the better part of four days and had seen his gentleness, his dedication, the skill of his large hands. There were no words to say. She opened the door, stepped inside. Twice during that long, terrible ordeal she'd flopped down onto her bed, and now it was a browned mess of bloodstains. That was the last, unbearable straw. She put her finger between her teeth and bit hard, and still could not stop the cry of anguish. It brought Nick Carew on the run. She turned to face him, eyes wide, lips pulled back in a grimace, shaking her head.

He glanced at the bed, back to her face. Silently he took her arm, led her from the room. A corpsman was hurrying down the passageway. Nick halted him. "It's not your job, but would you please put some clean sheets on Lieutenant Wilder's bed?"

The corpsman had seen them work for days without sleep, saw the strained, exhausted look on Liz's face. "Sure, Doc. Glad to."

Nick led her on down the passageway to his own quarters, pushed her down to sit on the side of a bunk. He produced a pint of brandy from his seabag and poured an inch, then handed her the glass. She held it in both hands, slumped, knees slightly apart, head hanging. When she made no effort to drink he sat beside her, put his hand on hers, and lifted. She sipped and the brandy burned her throat, proof that she was still aware, that she could still feel, and it all came back to her in fast, lurid, technicolor flashes, the man who had lost an arm saying, "Take him first, he's in worse shape than I am." E.O. weeping, unable to mop up the blood from the floor, the man who had asked, so politely, so quietly, to

have his legs moved. Her hands began shaking and she couldn't control them.

"For what, goddamnit?" she asked, her voice choked and raspy. "For *what*?"

A touch. It was more expressive than any words, just his hand on her shoulder, a pat-pat-pat. She straightened, turned her face to him, eyes wet. He put his other hand on her shoulder and, reaching out, seeking, her entire spirit demolished by the past four days, she leaned to him, put her head on his shoulder. It came out in a bellowing, unladylike burst of groaning, deep-seated, racking sobs and in her there was a tearing apart, gladness that she was alive along with a total knowledge of death. And anger, anger at all the men who had caused men to lie on her operating table, illustrating anatomy with exposed bones and gleaming pulsing organs, ruptured intestines, dangling colons, brutalized kidneys, and it all had to be wiped out, her mind had to be cleansed but there was no way of doing it, for she was alive and they were dead, so many of them, many of them dying even as she fought for them alongside this gentle man. He had ceased to be an individual and had become the personification of all living men. And then she was lifting her head, sobs abating, mouth still wide, to see his head lowering, a blank, helpless look on his face. When his lips touched hers she moaned and opened her mouth wide as if trying to suck life itself from his wet tongue. Her arms clung to him, squeezed hard enough to unbalance him and they tumbled, he atop, mouths working, the kiss made of desperation and hunger and loneliness and pain and unbearable sadness for all the mutilated and the dead. It was fast, so fast, not even bothering to undress completely but fumbling and tugging until her skirt was wadded around her waist and the union was total, swift, their combined strength almost brutal as their bodies danced the age-old ritual of life. No thinking, no true realization that it was even happening, just clinging together, an explosion and instant oblivion. Sleep. And then she was stumbling back to her room to clean sheets, and it seemed only moments before she was being shaken awake.

He was in the operating room ahead of her. She scrubbed, dressed, walked in to see his eyes examining her

over the top of his mask. "I'm—" he began, and she didn't want to hear it.

"Don't say it," she said.

The boy on the table was a burn case and he'd been in a raft for days under the brutal tropical sun. His entire body was covered by pus pockets.

"You start at the bottom," he said. And they worked toward each other, opening and sterilizing the hundreds of individual pockets of infection, and then there was the follow-up work and a trickle of wounded, many of the wounds, thank God, relatively minor. Some of these men had continued to fight with their wounds, and were only now being treated. And as they worked it was as if the event had never happened, for there had been only that mutual terrible need to reaffirm their existence.

E.O. Gardner, looking amazingly fresh, proudly sporting a bandage under his whites, caught her between patients. "You're relieved," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Company." He grinned. "Officers' lounge, forward."

She washed up, knowing who was waiting for her in the lounge. During the first hours, before her mind had been dulled by the work and the shock, she'd worried about him. She had known he'd be there.

He rose as she walked into the lounge. He was in soiled Marine battle dress. He looked tired. When she ran into his arms, he made no attempt to kiss her. They sat down, just looking at each other, smiling.

"Sorry to be such a mess," he said. "But I was told you'd be shoving off for Pearl in a few hours and I didn't want to miss you."

"You were out there," she said. He nodded. "Thank God you're all right."

He shrugged. "Want to hear about it?"

"God, no," she said. He shrugged again. Then: "Oh, yes, yes. I guess I have to hear about it, Mark. I don't want to, but I must. I owe that much to them. I think we all owe it to them to know. I wish I could take every god-damned politician in the world and make him stand in that operating room for seventy-two hours watching them come in with lungs ruined, legs blown off, eyes lying on their cheeks." She paused.

"I know."

"I'll never understand how they do it, *why* they do it."

"Well, to be a little corny, I guess we're living in an age of heroes," he said.

"Tell them, Mark. Tell everyone in the world how terrible it is."

"I wish I could. I find words inadequate. And then there's the fact that we still have a long war ahead of us." She shuddered. "And I guess I feel it's a necessary war, Liz. It's sort of a last stand for humanity and decency. I feel that strongly about it. Oh, hell, we have such a long history of brutality.

"Not too long ago I followed the brass around Betio to have a look. It was mostly over. They'd already started burying the Marine dead. Each grave is marked, carefully like, 'R.C. Daniels, killed in action November twenty-second, 1943.' There are five cemeteries over there.

"You know, you can sort of grasp one death, if it hits someone close to you, but when you hear about twenty thousand Chinese being killed, or something like that, it's just numbers. There on the island we'd see a man go down and know he was dead and he was just another one, a tragedy, but just one of many.

"Then we went into a captured Jap blockhouse and saw two Marines. The Japs had cut out their tongues and cut off their genitals. They died from loss of blood. And the thing that hit me, which hit even Howlin' Mad Smith, was a smoldering cigarette butt lying beside one of the Marines, just a butt, burned almost down to nothing. And his body was still warm and there were a dozen or more cigarette butts beside him and I just couldn't look. His body was still warm. And I tried to imagine him lying there, bleeding at the mouth and crotch and smoking and waiting and hoping. . . ."

"Oh, Mark."

"I followed the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Marines on this one," he said. "They hit the reef with seven hundred and fifty enlisted men. Best count is about three hundred left."

"And they'll have to do it again and again," Liz said. "I'm afraid so."

"Mark, it's not worth it."

"It has to be. If we begin to feel that way then they've died for nothing. It's worth it. It's worth it to keep people who would let a man bleed slowly to death, maybe for four days, from running the world. And don't get down

on the brass, like some people are going to do, because Tarawa was a tougher nut to crack than they thought it would be. In a way, we're just learning our trade out here. From here on in the landings will be more like Tarawa than like the Canal or Bougainville. There are a lot of small, heavily fortified islands between here and Tokyo Bay and we're going to have to hit them one by one."

He was moodily silent. E.O. stuck his head in the door, grinned. "Sell anyone a cup of coffee?"

"Hey, E.O.," Mark yelled, rising to take a mug of steaming coffee in one hand and slap the little corpsman on the back with the other.

Liz almost welcomed E.O.'s appearance. "Our boy's a real hero," she said, smiling. "He used the ship's Higgins boats to go out to the reef and pick up wounded."

"Little hot out there, wasn't it?" Mark grinned.

E.O. shrugged. "Well, you know."

"You damned men," Liz said. "He's going to get a purple heart and he's playing the modest, gee-ah-shucks-it-warn't-nothin' role."

Mark looked at her with a smile. "Would you like to tell me in detail about the hours you spent in the operating room?"

She tilted her head, thinking.

"What I mean is this," Mark said. "You told me once that if it were women in combat they'd talk their heads off about it. Still think so?"

Please, could you move my legs just a little? And it flowed up in her, overwhelming her, making her go rigid. She shook her head so hard it moved her torso.

"There will be a few who'll want to talk, but I think most of them will want to block it out, forget it. They'll remember catching chickens left by the Japs and how good their first hot meal tasted and how a shavetail found a sixteen-year-old native girl and dressed her up in men's clothing and told everyone she was his dogrobber. And they'll bitch about the lack of girls on Tarawa, but they won't talk much about the fighting because it's something not many men can face more than once, and the first time they faced it they were going on sheer guts and training."

"Where you off to now, Mark?" E.O. asked.

"Well, the 2nd is going to get a break. They're going back to Hawaii. I guess I'll tag along. I could use some

good booze and a quiet beach. Maybe I'll see you guys there."

"Maybe," E.O. said. He stood up. "Well, two's company. Nice to see you again, Mark."

"Keep your head down," Mark said.

Alone again, the grim atmosphere alleviated by E.O.'s innate cheerfulness, Mark leaned back, sipped coffee, looked at her with a pleased little smile.

"You're looking damned good, girl. A little frayed around the edges, but nothing that a few hours' sleep won't fix."

"You look like you need more than a few hours' sleep," she said, returning his smile.

"Six straight days of it," he said. "And then Hawaii. If they don't push you through to the States or somewhere, I'll buy you the biggest steak I can find and enough booze to make us both a little silly."

"Best offer I've had in years."

His eyes seemed to be devouring her. "Liz, remember once when you told me that if I wanted you—"

She looked down. "Yes."

"I thought about that a lot over on the island. And, believe it or not, I'm glad I didn't take you up on that offer. I don't know exactly how to say this, but I guess in this whole stinking mess you're about the only bright spot, the only clean thing in a dirty world, and when it's over. . . ."

She felt her face flush. She was thinking of the scene in Nick Carew's quarters in relation to Mark, and she was not quite sure she could ever look him in the face again. *The only clean thing in a dirty world.* Until then she had not felt soiled, knew enough basic psychology, knew enough about herself, to understand what had happened. But this was old Mark, old sweet, lovable, wonderful, gentle Mark, and she'd done him a great wrong.

"I guess, if we were different sorts of people, we could get married in Hawaii," he was saying.

"Mark, don't, not now."

"But knowing you and knowing myself I know we won't. It would mean you'd have to leave the service. And it would mean that I'd be reluctant to go do my job, wanting to be with you."

She knew she had to tell him, now, that moment. It would be unfair for him to continue thinking that she loved him. And, after all, she'd never told him that. She

loved him, yes, but she wasn't *in* love with him, and he deserved more than that, more than a girl whose weakness in the face of tragedy had her writhing and squirming, taking a hard muscled man's body to her.

"Mark, Mark, listen to me."

"Always."

"I can't think of love now. I don't know when I'll ever be able to think of it. Oh, I adore you and you know it, but somehow I sort of resent letting this man-woman thing intrude on my adoration for you." She paused, seeing his face go stiff. She moved quickly, threw herself onto her knees, took his hands in hers. "Please try to understand. I'm not in love with you. I'm not strong enough to accept the responsibility of your love. I want it to be the way it's always been with us. You're my truest and best friend and I need you so much as just that."

But he had needs too. Without knowing it, he'd made his way to the *Solicitude* with the same unrealized needs that she'd felt in Nick Carew's arms and, instead, it was just Liz, the girl next door, little sister. And he needed more than that. But he could not bring himself to hurt her.

"Okay, kid," he said. "I get the message. I understand. I'm not giving up, mind you, but you're right. We've got too far to go to get bogged down in personal relations now."

"Thank you, Mark," she said. She rose, kissed him on the cheek.

"Well, I guess I'd better get back. They're still cleaning up. Betio was the big nut, but there are twenty-five islands in the atoll and they'll have to sweep every one for Japs. Maybe we will have that steak in Hawaii."

"I'll hold you to it," she said.

She was thinking of him as the ship upped anchor, moved slowly away, all wards full. And she could see his face as clearly as if he were standing in front of her, his dear, sweet, wise, tired face, and the vision of her in Nick's bed blotted out the face and she wept, whispering, "Oh, Mark, I wish it had been you. God, how I wish it had been you."

Caskets began to fill as the ship steamed toward Hawaii, and each patient's loss was an additional body blow, for it seemed so unfair for them to have survived just long enough to die on the way home.

In her bed, she thought of Mark and hated herself for hurting him. She thought of things she should have said, could have said. She should have said, "I'm not the girl you think I am, Mark, the girl you want. You want someone shining clean and pure and good, like you. You're too good, just plain good, for me, Mark, and I won't bring you more unhappiness."

THIRTEEN

ABE Having kept Vivia waiting in his outer office for thirty minutes. She had gone there by taxi directly from the depot with half of the Great American Desert still on her, makeup freshened in the cab. Her skin felt as if all pores were solidly clogged. The wait did nothing for her growing doubt. Just how much pull did Bob B. Downs have? It wasn't like Abe to keep her waiting so long.

Los Angeles had changed since the last time she saw it. The streets bore no indication of gas rationing, the only overt signs of war being the slitted blackout headlights and the many old cars, for the auto industry had gone to war too and was producing jeeps, tanks, half-tracks, six-bys, Alligators, and airplanes. Of course there were uniforms everywhere, in groups, alone, lucky ones holding a girl's hand.

Finally, she was admitted to his office. He looked calm, although his desk was littered and he was just hanging up the telephone as his secretary showed her in. He rose, held out both hands, a beaming smile on his face.

"Vivia, so nice to see you. When was it last? When you were first going out on the Blue Circuit with Rudy Blake, wasn't it?"

"I've traveled a lot of miles since then, Mr. Having," she said. He showed her to a chair, offered, ugh, coffee, which she accepted just to be polite.

"You don't know how I envy you, all of you," he said.

"Well, you're doing your part, sir," she said.

"Oh, yes, yes," he said impatiently. "But the places you've been. Ah, if I were twenty years younger."

She laughed. "I'll bet you can still do a mean soft shoe."

"Just try me." He grinned. Then he sobered. "I don't think I have to guess why you're here."

"If you guess that I want to go back as soon as possible, you hit it on the first try."

"Yes, well. But don't you need a little rest? I've followed your progress, the travels of the troupe. My God, the distances, just thinking of them makes me tired."

"I'd like to have a day or two, to see my folks."

"Well, why don't you just run on up to San Francisco and I'll be in touch," he said, lifting some papers.

She couldn't let it go at that. Running vividly through her mind was Bob B. Downs's threat to send her home and see that she never worked again.

"I'd be willing to rejoin the Downs troupe," she said.

He looked uncomfortable. "Well, ah, that would be a little tough to arrange," he said. "You see, they're about due to come back—"

"Working their way back," she said.

"Well, ah, as a matter of fact, Vivia. . . ." He paused.

"So good old Bob B. made good on his threats." She sighed. "What did that son-of-a-bitch tell you?"

"I gather that all was not sweetness and light between you two," he said.

"Which counts more, Mr. Having, the troops or the ego of a little man who thinks he's Bob Hope?"

He chuckled. "Personally, I think that's a good description of Downs. But he is a big name, Vivia. Quite frankly, he would not have you back. And there's just nothing else going out at the moment."

"I see, so Bob B. Downs is running Camp Shows, Inc."

He bristled. "Not at all. Look, I've had reports on you. The men love you. I've got letters, I've got news clippings. As a matter of fact, when I learned that you were accompanying Miss Briefer home, I began to check around. Now there's a possibility of getting you in the Joe E. Brown troupe, but they won't be going out until the new year, and then to the E.T.O. As I suggested, why don't you just go on home, rest up, see the family, and as soon as I can—"

She leaned forward, her face set firmly. "I want you to give it to me straight, Mr. Having. Just how much weight does Bob B. Downs have with the U.S.O.?"

"No more than any other star," he said quickly. Then

he sighed. "Look, honey, when you get the name of trouble maker—"

"Shit," she said. "Why don't you just come out and say it? Tell me how many troupe heads have turned me down."

"Several. I'm ashamed to say it, but several."

"Okay," she said. "I think I got the picture. But I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Having. Bob B. Downs might be a big name, but what those men want out there is Vivian Wilder. They laugh at Downs, but even before he finishes his act they're yelling 'girls, girls, girls,' and that's me. That's people like Lynn Briefer and the others. As far as the men are concerned, the Bob B. Downs type is just fill between girls. And I'll tell you something else. I'm going back. You may not think it at the moment, but you'll find out."

"You'll go back," he said. "When we find the proper show for you."

"Sooner than that," she said. She rose. "No hard feelings, Mr. Having. You're a swell guy, and you gave me my first break with Rudy and the boys, but I'm going back."

She used most of her last few dollars to send a cable to Hawaii. And then she boarded a train and there were her mother and father and hugs and tears and sweet, long nights of twelve to fourteen hours' sleep.

Then she began to fret. There had been no answer at all to her cable. However, it was not all bad. She had confidence that things would begin to move, and meantime she was at home and she was accepted by her parents as a fully adult woman. She was nineteen years old, but she'd traveled half the world and no one could treat her like a child. They even seemed proud of her. Her mother showed her a newspaper article about the troupe. There was a nice picture of her in the silver lamé gown, surrounded by a group of smiling sailors.

She had money. Her pay hadn't been a fortune, but she'd spent little. There'd been no place to spend it. She had enough to do some shopping. Fully confident that she'd be going back, she had a new silver lamé tailored to her developing figure, bought a new black. The choices were not many, especially in underwear, and there was that old phrase used to explain everything. There was

a war on. But she found some decent shoes and a couple of light summer outfits suitable for the Pacific.

The city bustle seemed like another world. It was interesting just to walk, to watch people, to ride the bell-clanging little cable cars and see the servicemen home on leave. A few of them, home from the Pacific, recognized her and spoke and she favored them with her blazing smile.

She had, she found, become quite the celebrity. Old high school friends and acquaintances called or dropped by as word was passed that she was home, and there was no lack of invitations. However, she found their parties quite dull. Many of the girls she'd graduated with were newly married, and a surprising number of them to men not in service. Hearing about how tough it was to live on an insurance salesman's commissions, about how tough it was to find a decent piece of rationed beef, made her want to tell them to knock off the self-pity. The boys in the services had a saying for it: "You think this is rough? Wait until next week." None of these people knew what rough was. But, as November passed without word from Hawaii or Abe Having, the parties gave her something to do. She always went as a single. She had offers, of course. A few of the boys she'd known were around and unmarried, but now they all seemed so young.

She'd always had a group around her, but in this world that seemed so bland, so meaningless, she now became a loner. She spent a lot of time just moving about the city. She shopped without buying, walked aimlessly, and then it was December and the chilly fogs made the city seem cozy and closed in.

One day she came in from the streets to the smells and bustle of a large department store, wandered to the second-floor snack bar, ordered hot chocolate and a chicken salad sandwich, saw, alone in a booth, a girl who looked familiar. She was not beautiful, but rather striking, hair shoulder-length, gleaming clean, clothing speaking of taste, not too fashionable but smart, conservative, a camel overjacket with a severe little blouse underneath. The girl caught her looking, shifted her eyes away and then back quickly, gave a tentative little smile. Vivian still couldn't quite place her. Soon the girl rose and came toward her, that shy little smile showing.

"Hello, Vivian Ruth," the girl said, halting in front of

Vivia's booth, medium tall, good posture, very smart in a subdued, sophisticated sort of way.

"Hi," Vivia said, quickly ransacking her memory. "Long time, isn't it?"

"Senior year. How have you been? I've heard and read about what you've been doing, and I just want to tell you that I think it's a wonderful thing."

"Thank you. Hey, have a seat."

She sat, brushing her skirt down the back of her thigh, looking at Vivia with that shy smile.

"I'll be damned," Vivia said. "Gloria May! Gloria May Swan. Class valedictorian."

"I didn't think you recognized me," Gloria May said.

"Not in a million years," Vivia said. "Your hair. It used to be mouse brown."

She lowered her eyes, carefully made up, and smiled. "As the song says, 'If the color keeps, Louie Phillipe's to blame.'"

"It's very becoming."

"And you—" Gloria May said. "I hope you don't mind."

"Me?" Vivia said.

"I always thought you were the most beautiful girl in school, always wanted to be a blond. Now I am one."

Vivia laughed. "Old E.O. Hey, listen, tell me about yourself. What's brought on the miraculous transformation? Still going to be a teacher?"

"Oh, there isn't much to tell. Nothing quite as exciting as what you've been doing. I want to hear all about it."

"You first," Vivia said.

"Well, I went away to school—"

"Where?"

"California at Berkeley."

"Hey, great. What are you studying?"

"Well, the first couple of years it's pretty standard stuff, English and math and history and language. But I'm working toward pre-med."

"A doctor? Gee, that's tough, isn't it?"

"Well, the war is helping to make it easier. Women are moving into all sorts of professions that used to be more or less closed to them, or at least limited. I don't know if I'll make it."

"The brain of the school? You'll make it, no sweat."

"I'm going to try," Gloria May said. "But now let's

talk about you. It's so exciting, and we're all very proud of you. You must be quite proud, doing something really worthwhile for the war effort."

"Well, not really proud," she said. "Smug, I guess. I think I get more out of it than the men I entertain."

"Well, self-fulfillment is quite important. There have been several stories about you in the newspapers. Did you know that?"

"I've seen a couple of them."

"And I had a letter from Clayton. He saw your show in Hawaii."

For a moment she couldn't place Clayton, and then she remembered. Gloria May had always been talking about her older brother. "Your brother."

"Yes. He said you were quite wonderful. You know, he was always after me to get him a date with you during our last year in high school, when he was home on leave."

Well, she remembered that too. And she'd always sort of fobbed Gloria May off, thinking of a fellow called "Clayton," a male copy of Gloria May, deadly serious, drab, a real drag. What the hell kind of a name was Clayton?

"As a matter of fact, he's home for Christmas," Gloria May said. "He still talks about you. We're having a party for him Friday night. It would be nice if you could come."

"He's in the navy, isn't he?" Vivia asked, buying time. The last thing she wanted was to get bogged down with a fellow named Clayton. It sounded so stuffy, so old.

"Oh, no, the Air Corps. He's a staff sergeant now."

Swell. She had him placed now. A fellow who'd been in the service since 1942, in a branch where promotion was a lot faster than in others, and still only a one-rocker sergeant. Must be a real on-the-ball cat.

"Vivian," Gloria May said, then halted. "I keep forgetting that your professional name is Vivia. Do you prefer that?"

"Yeah, I've gotten used to it."

"Vivia, would you please come? Clayton has wanted to meet you for so long. The first time he saw you, when you were a cheerleader and he was home for a football game, he asked me about you."

"He was, what, two, three years ahead of us in high school?"

"Three."

"Well, gee, I don't know," she said. "Friday night, huh?"

"That's right. Clayton could come and pick you up."

Yeah, sure, and she'd be stuck with him the rest of the night. "Look, Gloria May, I can't give you an answer right now, okay? I mean, I'm expecting a call from the U.S.O. and all."

"Well," Gloria May said, looking a bit hurt, "I'll give you my telephone number and you can call me and let me know. Would you do that?"

"Sure."

Once or twice, during the next couple of days, she thought about old Gloria May and put off the telephone call. She had no intention of going. Gloria May had changed, all right, but her stuffily named brother was an unknown quantity and she just didn't want to risk spending an entire evening with a dud. Besides, she had other things to worry about. She'd sent off another cable to Hawaii. She'd made two or three calls to Abe Having in Los Angeles, and the results were nil. Finally, on Thursday, cleaning out her purse, she came across Gloria May's telephone number. She had, after all, promised to call. She was working up her excuse when the doorbell rang. Her mother was in the kitchen. Vivian yelled that she'd get it and opened the door to a smiling, very attractive, very mature-looking young brunette in navy blue.

"Liz, Liz, Liz," she yelled, flinging herself at her sister. It was long after the joy of reunion, after the weeping hugs and happy kisses, the family all together and the songs of Christmas on the radio, that she thought again of Gloria May and made a quick, abrupt telephone call to say that it was impossible for her to come to the party since her older sister had just come home from the Pacific.

There was a turkey, and dressing, and cranberry sauce, and candied yams, and spiced peaches, and even if the spread was margarine instead of butter, even if the tea was sweetened with saccharine instead of sugar, there was warmth and joy and two well-traveled young women regaling each other and their parents with lighthearted anecdotes, Liz avoiding the hairy stuff until during that period between holidays when things seem to stand still and there is only a waiting for the new year, she talked

quietly about the wounded, and her work, the horror of it. And then she was gone.

Vivia stayed at home on New Year's Eve. She listened to the 1943 summary of events from CBS. It had been an eventful year. The Germans had been cleared from the continent of Africa, Sicily had been invaded, and Italy had surrendered, only to be occupied by a former ally, the Germans. The British and American armies were in Italy. In the Pacific, the long march had begun, with the Solomons, with bloody Tarawa, a name that made Americans shudder. On the home front F.D.R. was expected to run for a fourth term in 1944, much to the chagrin of a few and the relief of many.

She sat up with her mother and father until an announcer counted down the seconds, broadcasting from Times Square, and Guy Lombardo played "Auld Lang Syne" and then it was 1944 and she lay awake for the first hour of it thinking profane thoughts about Bob B. Downs, the Camp Show organization, and Jeff Walters, who had been so convincing, saying, "If there's ever anything I can do, just yell."

Well, she'd yelled, not once but twice, and he hadn't even had the decency to write.

She awoke with a gnawing feeling of anger and helplessness. She'd dreamed about being on a huge naval base, thousands of the wonderful men out in front of a stage, and she was up there saying, "I love you all, each and every one of you," and the wonderful sound of applause had waked her to another grim, endless day. During that long January 1, 1944, she was restless. She told her parents she'd decided to go down to L.A., to see Having again. She checked train schedules, packed, was ready to go forth and do battle with nails, fangs, and teeth when the letter arrived. It was not from Jeff, surprisingly, but from the admiral.

Dear Vivia,

My apologies for taking so long to get back to you. Both Jeff and I have been rather busy, having finally been relieved of our posts in Hawaii to do more exciting things.

Both Jeff and I agree, as do many others, that you

are too valuable to waste killing time there in San Francisco. I have done some checking into your situation. Apparently you had some personal conflicts with your previous associates, and it took a bit of pressure here and there to convince certain persons in the Navy Department that, as Jeff put it, you were taking a bad rap.

You should be hearing directly from either the Department of the Navy or from USO Camp Shows, Inc., within the month.

The letter was signed very formally and gave no APO or address, but she whooped with joy. Good old Jeff, good old Bill. The call from Having came that afternoon. He said he might have something for her, if she was interested. She was packed and ready.

"The requisition is for a small unit," Having explained. "Entertainer, singer, accordion player."

"Jesus Christ," she said. "An accordion?"

"I told you you might not be interested. The idea is that a small group can be taken to places where a larger troupe can't go easily. The navy wants to bring something to the isolated units, the places nearer the front. I think, quite frankly, Vivia, that you'd be wrong to take this one. You're a band singer."

"A bloody accordion," she said. "Hell, yes, I'll take it."

"You're sure?"

"As the sailors say, Mr. Having," she said, "you fuckin' A I'm sure."

But she wasn't so sure when she saw what Having called an entertainer. He looked as if he were on his last legs, a skinny, wrinkled old guy with a shock of silver-gray hair. And when she learned his gig she almost gagged. He was a magician.

"Vivia," Having said, "meet Gaylord the Great."

Great God, she was thinking. But from beneath huge, bushy gray eyebrows, the bright blue eyes twinkled. "The Lord has been good to me," he said, "to allow me to anticipate traveling the watery wastes of the world with such a vision of pulchritude."

"I always thought that was a dirty word," she said,

liking that twinkle, seeing that he moved only slowly, not feebly.

"If I succeed in sawing you in half, which half is mine?" he asked, taking her hand.

The accordion player was a kid, just a little older than she. They got together, she and Gaylord the Great and the kid, Art Damling, in a rehearsal hall rented by Camp Shows that swallowed them up and made the accordion sound weak and empty.

"What kinda songs you sing, Miss Wilder?" Art asked, peering at her from behind thick hornrims.

"What kind you know?" she asked, with a feeling of hopelessness.

"Oh, I dunno." He toodled a little on the keyboard, nothing much coming out but chords. She sighed, envisioning singing with the equivalent of a three-chord guitar player for accompaniment. The gawk, Art the accordion player, then spread his long fingers and grabbed about half a yard of keys and produced a sound bigger than she'd ever heard on a squeeze box. He did a little running thing that came out with the opening phrase of "I Had the Craziest Dream."

"You gear that down a little?" she asked. He switched keys. She started in a low, throaty voice and he became subdued behind her, grinning, peering out with his big eyeballs from the thick lenses and out of that damned squeeze box came sounds she'd thought impossible for such a square instrument and he began to wrap it around her voice, anticipating her phrasing, big, jazzy sounds. She'd never heard a squawkbox man like him before, didn't believe it. He made the accordion almost a musical instrument and it was two hours later when she looked up, having discovered that this damned Art Damling knew every song ever written and some she wasn't sure had been, and that he was one of the most competent musicians she'd ever worked with. Old Gay the Great had lain down on three chairs pulled together and was knocking off the z's.

"Man, you're something else," she said. "You're a one-man orchestra."

"Thanks," he said simply. "They gonna buy our lunch?"

She had her stage wardrobe. Art had his box and a couple of pairs of slacks. The Great Gay had a trunk of old and incredibly corny tricks. They all fit into a PBY

and, while the Marines were hitting Kwajalein in the Marshalls, Camp Show Unit #666 hit Hawaii and didn't even stop for a breather, not even long enough for her to try to find out where the admiral was so she could thank him. At first they traveled in some comfort, mostly in Clippers and PBY's and then, as Gaylord the Great became dazed by the number of previously undiscovered islands that had been found and peopled by American servicemen, as the miles began to add up and they got closer and closer to where the action was, they often had to try to sleep lying down in the belly of a bomber, or made short hauls on any kind of navy noncombat vessel that moved.

With The Great Gay, a lovable but dirty old man, she worked out a routine that bordered on the risqué. But with the old man's stage dignity and her clean-cut all-American girl look, it stayed within the bounds of good taste and humor. It was a variation on the old saw-a-woman in half trick. Gaylord set up an elaborate device on stage and told the audiences that he had developed a way to not only saw a woman in half, but divide her into many parts. When he said, "For example, I can saw off a leg," Vivia showed a shapely calf through the slit in her silver lamé. "Which of you would like the left leg?" That, of course, caused some reaction from men who hadn't seen a woman in months.

Then Art, who had clowned around on the box during the magic act, would get serious and she'd sweep to the front of the stage and say, "I'd planned to sing a couple of songs, but I'm afraid I'm keeping you fellows from your work."

God, it was just great. With such a small unit they could go anywhere, entertain in messhalls, on board a ship in some godforsaken anchorage, in hastily erected clubhouses, on the bed of a big truck. And there was no one to dampen her spirits, no Bob B. Downs to make things sticky with his jealousy. Gaylord was so happy just to be doing something that mattered at his age that he lived in a glow of contentment. And Art Damling didn't give a damn as long as he had his box with him.

"I am keeping you fellows from something," she said, as cheers and applause brought encore after encore.

"Yeah—from suffering!" a man yelled.

She realized a few bad memories when she found that

the next stop was in the Solomons. But even in the steamy heat, as the little unit played for men on New Georgia, the Canal, Bougainville, it was still great and all that old stuff was in the past. You can't alter the past. It was over. Done.

It was on Bougainville that a new twist was added. The idea grew from the routine in which the Great Gay offered various parts of Vivia to the men. The USO had come to the island, but things were still quite primitive. In talking with the lieutenant in charge of island clubs and services, she learned that funds for building an enlisted man's club were hard to come by. There was an officers' club, of sorts, and a unit commander had approached Vivia, asking her to join the officers in the club after the show. She usually did so as a matter of course, for if anyone had ice, it was the officers. That day, she had an idea.

"Men," she said, as the show was ending, "I've been invited to have dinner in the officers' club."

The crowd groaned. "Officers' meat," a voice yelled, and was shouted down.

"Maybe I'll have dinner instead in the E.M. messhall," she said, to a great roar.

"But maybe I won't," she said. "I'm told there are no funds for an E.M. club, and that gave me an idea. What about I sell myself—" A roar. She smiled innocently. "Just my company, men," she said archly, "just a couple of songs. I'll bring old Art Dam and his box for a chap-erone. But it's going to cost someone, and the money raised goes to the E.M. fund. That okay with you?"

The club lieutenant got the idea quickly. "A hundred dollars for the officers' club," he yelled out.

A group of sergeants put their heads together and one said, "Hundred and twenty-five for the E.M.'s."

It became a regular part of the show, in places where club officers were finding it hard to get things done, and it was a safe bet. The officers could always raise more money than the enlisted men. So she didn't have to suffer through an evening with the grunts, with nothing to drink but warm beer and nothing to eat but beef stew. And it got her a story in *Time*. "*USO showgirl sells herself to build an enlisted man's club.*" It didn't get her laid, not for a couple of months, and when it did happen, it wasn't because she was selling *that*.

It was because a major in Port Moresby was such a nice man, a little older, maybe forty, and because she was human and it taught her one important lesson. You didn't have to be in love, as she'd been in love with Terry, and as she had been so very, very fond of Bill Partier. If the man were nice and skillful the little bells rang and you felt great and a lot of life's little tensions seemed unimportant for a long time afterward. You didn't do it openly, of course. She had too much to lose. She was alive again after that deadly period of inactivity, and she wouldn't risk that again even if she never got her chimes rung again for the rest of her life. But there were ways, and the Pacific was full of ever-so-nice men, a nice lieutenant colonel in Darwin, for example.

The distances were great, the men lonely, the joy of working with Art Damling never ending. He was full of nice surprises, came up with some great ideas, taught her more about music than any man had before, and she was grateful to him, grateful for the opportunity. Oh, it was so great to stand in front of a big band and wail it out, but it was something else, something grander, more rewarding, to do it all alone with the help of just a little bit of skilled music. She would have given her eyeteeth for drums and a bass, but Art, the one-man band, wasn't bad. Not bad at all.

1944 was Vivian's year. She claimed it, conquered it, reveled in it. It wasn't all fun and games, however. Once they were under fire while flying in an Air Corps bomber and she was scared, thinking of what had happened to Tamara Dreisen back in 1943, when a Clipper went down off the coast of Portugal, killing twenty people, a lot of them USO entertainers. Jane Froman had been on that plane, and she was hurt badly, but when she recovered she volunteered for more USO assignments. Tamara Dreisen had been a big star, and she was dead, and with two Jap planes making passes while the B-17's guns yammered and roared, Vivian thought about that. And when one of the Japs blew up even while she was peeking out a porthole, or whatever it was they called them on bombers, she went back to kiss the waist gunner, not on the cheek, but on the lips. He blushed and she giggled. It was, she realized, the first time she'd ever kissed an enlisted man.

"Fellas, let's give Gaylord the Great a big hand. Did you like him? You'd better have, he did the same tricks for your fathers in World War One."

For Immediate Release

FROM: 8 West 40th Street
USO-CAMP SHOWS
New York, New York
Pennsylvania 6-4641

Our fighting men in the Pacific are talking about the USO's own Vivia Wilder, Sweetheart of the Islands. During the first few months of 1944, Miss Wilder, with Unit #666, consisting of the famous magician Gaylord the Great and the talented accordionist Art Damling, have traveled over 50,000 miles while entertaining an estimated 200,000 troops of all services.

Miss Wilder's speciality is the song, the song that reminds our men of home, of the girl next door, of the senior prom and Saturday night dances, but she has developed into a well-rounded performer, always ready with the ad-lib quip, the quick comeback, the capper.

Born in San Francisco in 1924, Miss Wilder will celebrate her 20th birthday somewhere in the Pacific. She will not lack for birthday greetings, for her travels with her own unit and with the Bob B. Downs troupe during 1943 have endeared her to thousands.

For reasons of military security, it is not possible to detail Miss Wilder's travels, nor to talk about her grueling schedule in the coming summer months. Let it be said only that if there is an island where the men of the United States armed forces are stationed, just look up, men, that next plane or ship might be bringing your way a young man with an accordion and a delightful old veteran of show business who will stand before you on some makeshift stage and say:

"Fellas, Miss Vivia Wilder."

After a sleepless night, flying in the belly of a bomber, the little troupe set up shop, with the help of the ever-present Seabees, who always could manage electricity

for the mike even on a recently won island, and Vivian went through her wife-mother-sweetheart routine, developed during the past few weeks.

"We're here to do more than sing and play and do tricks for you," she said. "We're here to remind you of your father." The Great Gaylord stepped onto the stage in a ratty robe, a pipe in his mouth, a newspaper held before him. The men roared with laughter. "Your little brother." Art grinned from behind his thick glasses and said, "Hey, gimme a quarter, huh?" The men groaned and roared. "Your sweethearts," she said, striking an innocent pose and batting her eyelashes. "Yeah," the men yelled. "Your wives," she cooed, catching a doll tossed to her by Gaylord, cradling the baby and rocking it. "Your mothers," she said, drawing a shawl over her long, blond hair. "Now you eat your spinach, son, do you hear?"

Amid the roars a tall, good-looking GI leaped onto the stage, seized the mike, and leaned into it. "Miss Wilder," he said, "we appreciate it, but I have to tell you, you don't look like anyone's sweetheart, or wife, and I'll be damned if you look like *anyone's* mother. What you look like is an angel from Heaven." Placing a kiss on her forehead, he leaped back down into the crowd.

FOURTEEN

MARK Fillmore wrote about Tarawa from the gut. He knew it would hit hard at home, for nothing so far had been so terrible, had cost so many lives, as that bloody little atoll. He wrote it for Colonel Amey and Corporal James Teague and the corporal named Matt, whose last name he had never learned. He wrote it for the men who waded through five hundred yards of death-filled water. Winning an award was the last thing in his mind, and, indeed, when word came that a Pulitzer was almost a certainty, it didn't mean much to him. He was still numb.

He'd gone ahead to Hawaii from the Gilberts and was there when the battered 2nd Division came to a new base. They were waiting for shipments from the training

camps to fill their depleted ranks. He spent the first day writing, then he slept for twenty hours and thought about sleeping another twenty, but, instead, went out to check on the *Solicitude*. Since she wasn't due for days, he did some more writing, ate and slept and drank, tried to forget what Liz had said. He was more hurt than he'd admit, even to himself. He'd seen enough death and blood to last a dozen of the most avid correspondents a lifetime. And there'd be more. Everyone knew, just by looking at a map, that the Marshall Islands lay in the path of the push across the Pacific. The navy high brass knew that Kwajalein was on the planning maps, and Eniwetok, and then there'd be an old score to settle on the U.S. island of Guam, which the Japs had taken early in the war.

Admiral Partier, whom Mark had liked, was no longer in command of the Hawaiian area, had gone somewhere out there with a task force. Mark liked the man who'd taken his place. All navy, an Annapolis man, as were most of the higher ranks, a horseman when he had the chance, he was a permanent resident of Oahu. Mark soon learned, too, that Admiral J.R. (Jolly Roger) Smith was the father of a green-eyed, leggy vision, introduced to him in Smith's home as "our little Cicily." She was small, but she was no "little Cicily." Petite, delicate, yet so solidly constructed, a lovely little package, she looked up at him from those deep green eyes, her auburn hair pulled back and slightly damp from a swim, dressed in a one-piece swimsuit that showed tiny waist, long legs, pertly mature breasts slightly flattened by the swimsuit top.

"For a legend, you're not a'tall bad," she said, with a delightful trace of southern accent. He raised an eyebrow. "That's all I've heard," she said. "Mark Fillmore, the Marine's answer to Ernie Pyle." Her smile was a pleasure. "Actually, it is an honor, Mr. Fillmore. I've seen your accounts of the Tarawa battle. They were terrible." Again she smiled. "I mean the subject matter, not the writing. I think you did more in a few words to make people realize what war is all about than any other man has done."

"Actually, I'm like Renard's sparrow," he said. "I say *peep* and think that's all there is to say."

"So charmingly modest too," Cicily said.

A houseboy brought drinks. Cicily drew a little terry-cloth robe over her and sat, feet up, sipping as Mark and Admiral Smith talked about the war. She showed no sign of restlessness, no need for attention. Now and then she'd put in a comment or ask a question. When the admiral was called to the telephone a silence fell on the shaded patio and Mark looked at her. She was examining his face through hooded eyes, lids so delicate he could see the faint tracings of veins.

"Did you bring a bathing suit?" she asked.

"Afraid not."

"By taking in a couple of pleats you could wear one of Dad's."

"Well—"

"Or are you afraid it would fall off at a crucial time?"

"That would be embarrassing, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said with a little smile. "The water is fresh, still cool."

"Bring a safety pin, then, so I can secure things."

She was in the water, cutting the length of the pool with a strong overhand stroke when he came out of the bathhouse, the suit pinned at one side, legs baggy. She rested with her elbows on the side of the pool. "Not exactly what the well-dressed man wears," she teased, "but you have nice shoulders."

Cicily Smith was twenty-three. He learned this and other things about her during that first afternoon as, having exhausted himself in the pool, he lay in the warm sun on a beach towel on thick grass and she came to put a towel beside him, leaning on an elbow, and they talked. When war broke out she had been with her maternal grandparents in Greensboro, North Carolina, attending college.

"Had a devil of a time getting home when I graduated," she said. "You wouldn't know about that, being a V.I.P., but even an admiral's daughter can't get priority on a clipper flight to Honolulu."

"Glad you made it," Mark said.

"Are you?"

He decided the question really didn't call for an answer. He decided, also, that the tiny Cicily Smith, with her faint trace of accent, those fantastic, huge green eyes that seemed to slant slightly in an almost Oriental way, was very pretty. Correct that, he told himself, when she came

down to dinner dressed in slinky black. The tiny Cicily Smith was a knockout.

It was a formal dinner, lots of brass. When it was over and the traditional cigars and brandy were passed around in the admiral's study and the women went off to chat, Mark got the word. Kwajalein was on the planners' maps for the end of January.

"Expect you'll be there, Fillmore," said General Julian Smith, of the 2nd Division.

"I expect so, general," Mark said.

"Sorry the 2nd can't be," the general said. "But it will take us a little longer to get back out there."

"I imagine the men hope so," Mark said.

"They're incredible," said Julian Smith, "these Marines. Even after a scrap like we had on Tarawa you give them one weekend liberty, feed them good chow for a week, and they're getting restless. They know something is up for the 4th Division, and they're afraid that what they call the boot division is going to hog all the glory." He chuckled. "Know what they say about the 4th's division commander? It's Harry Schmidt, you know. They say those boots are so dumb they don't even know how to spell Smith."

Mark didn't see Cicily again that night, but when he came down for breakfast the next morning she was there, in white shorts and halter, bent seriously over a half melon from which she took her attention only long enough to wave a spoon and mumble, "Morning," with her mouth full. After breakfast it took little persuasion from her to get him out into the morning sunshine for a walk. The admiral's land holdings extended into and past the formal gardens and under the spreading palms down toward the water. There was small talk about the beautiful morning, the nice beach, the state of the surf. She stood on the strand and shaded her green eyes and looked out to sea. Mark found himself unable to take his eyes off her. She'd piled her auburn hair atop her head, making her seem taller. As he stood beside her, she came just above his heart.

"I like the way you look at me," she said, still gazing out to sea.

"Do you have eyes in the side of your head?" he asked. "A man can't even sneak an appreciative stare."

She looked up at him. "There, that's better. I thought you were never going to do anything but look at me."

"Hey, Cicily," he said with a grin, "you're flirting with a man who's been out in the islands for months."

"Oooo, I'm so frightened."

He didn't know quite how to handle a girl who was either very forward or having a little bit of fun leading him on. He turned away.

"When are you going to ask me to go out with you?" she asked. He jerked around again.

"When?" he asked dumbly.

"Tonight."

"Cicily," he said, recovering, "will you go out with me tonight?"

"I'd planned to all along."

"Where?"

"Oh, dinner. Dancing. Since I've decided I want you, we'll have to go through the formalities and get acquainted."

"What you just heard," Mark said, after a moment, "was a very loud gulp."

"Don't be so shocked. I don't mean that I want you *that* way, although I'm sure that will be a part of it when it's legal. I mean I want you to keep."

He shook his head with a laugh. "I'll be the first to admit that you're too much for me, Cicily. How much of you is real?"

"We Smith women are always quite chaste, quite lady-like, quite sophisticated. We're a proud, old family—on both sides. But there's one thing about us. When we see what we want, we go after it. Now I'm twenty-three going on twenty-four and I've seen what I want. Don't be frightened. I'll be gentle with you. I'll give you a few weeks to get used to the idea, but I'm going to marry you before you go chasing off to Kwajalein after the 4th Marines."

"Listen, that's pretty hush-hush information," he said, still trying to decide on a reaction.

"I'm a navy brat, not a spy. Why shouldn't I know? I'm curious, that's all. I eavesdrop. But the information is safe with me. Comment?"

"I hope it's safe," he said.

"No, I mean about the threat I've just made on your freedom and bachelorhood."

"Another gulp, for the moment."

"Where shall we have dinner?"

He laughed suddenly. "I'm not trying to chicken out, but I just remembered something. My pay from the paper hasn't caught up with me and I'm living on credit and good faith at the hotel right now. I couldn't pay a head-waiter anything but a compliment."

"No sweat," she said. "I'm not rich, but I have a little inheritance from a grandmother, my grandmother Smith. I'll have more. I will be rather comfortably off, someday—not soon, I hope, but when I am you can quit newspaper work and write a novel and make yourself famous."

"Cicily, Jesus Christ," he said.

"If you're going to address me as a divinity," she teased, "please use the correct name. I am the Virgin Mary. Virgin, at least."

"Are you always like this?" he asked, helpless.

She looked at him seriously. "I want you to believe this, Mark. I've never been like this before in my life."

"I don't understand."

"Am I coming on too strong, really? It's just that I believe in total honesty. I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that I looked at you and things went *twang* and *boom* and *whee* inside me. It's never happened before. I've had my share of beaux, to use one of my favorite southernisms, but aside from a few kisses—"

"Cicily, come on."

"I want you to know," she said. "I really am a virgin. We Smith women believe in saving ourselves for the men we marry. I've been drunk a few times in college, and once I let a man put his hand in my bra—"

"My God," Mark said.

"—but I stopped him. You, sir, will not be allowed more than sedate kisses until I march you down the aisle. And, having tamed you, I'll then become what we Smith women always are, dutiful and loving wives. I'll bully you now, because I think you might be a little shy. But I won't after we're married, promise."

"Why me?" he asked, close to flight.

"Why? Well, you look sort of like Clark Gable. But that's not it. It's just chemistry, I guess. For every man there's a woman, and vice versa, and for me you're it."

"I think you're pulling my leg."

"No. Not in the slightest. And now let's go back and

have a swim so that I can study your shoulders some more."

"I have to get back into town."

"I'll run you in, then. If you have work to do, I'll shop for something new and exciting for dinner tonight. And don't worry about the money. I'll lend you some. You have to pay me back, though. We Smith women are thrifty."

It wasn't until he was dancing with her that he decided, after all, that he liked being swept off his feet. She was dainty, tiny perfection in his arms, fitted him perfectly with her head on his chest, danced so smoothly that it made his rather stiff dancing look good. He had taken a sheaf of bills from her prior to entering the restaurant and, somewhat guiltily, had gone into the men's room to count it. It was the first time he'd ever borrowed money from a woman, but there had been a lot of firsts, already, with Cicily.

She enjoyed the food, cleaning her plate, agonized over dessert. "What the heck, it's a special occasion," and she ordered ice cream.

She insisted he take her home in her car and then take the car back to the city with him. "That way you'll be forced to come back out tomorrow." They walked into the back garden and then she came to him, almost shyly, and her kiss was a little flutter against his lips, so sweet, so soft. He thought of Liz. They were so different, these two. And as he thought of Liz the pain was there again and he drew Cicily tightly into his arms and the kiss deepened. When he released her she sighed.

"Am I getting to you?" she asked.

He took her hand and led her to a bench, slightly damp with dew, wiped it off with his handkerchief, sat her down. When he sat, she snuggled up to him.

"Cicily, quite frankly, I can't believe you've fallen for me as quickly and completely as you claim."

"You will," she said in a soft voice.

"But, to assume that you're being honest, I guess I owe you the same."

"Nice of you."

"You're a beautiful girl," he said.

"But?"

"To coin a phrase, we don't know each other."

"I know all the important things about you," she said.

"You can't possibly."

"I know that some woman has hurt you very deeply," she said, pulling up to look into his face and dare him to deny it. He was silent. "You don't have to tell me about her unless you want to."

"Well, not now, at least," he said. "Cicily, suppose you are telling the truth."

"Oh, ye of little faith."

"Suppose you are in love with me. I will tell you quite readily that it would be easy for any man to fall in love with you, but what if I don't? What if too much water has already gone under the bridge? To coin another phrase. The last thing I'd want to do is hurt you."

"Oh, it wouldn't be your fault. Like a good military leader I have spotted my objective and am making all efforts to capture it. But war is hell, they say. Even the best generals don't always take the objective. If you find that you can't even force yourself to love me, no hard feelings. We Smith women don't hold grudges, and we don't weep over untaken objectives. I might become an old maid, but no tears on your tie, sir."

"You, lady, are just a little bit nutty."

"About you, sir." She raised her face. "I'm not a dutiful wife yet, so I order you to shut up and kiss me."

He did.

Then: "Damn it, I want to talk, Cicily. I guess I know now how a girl feels when some smooth-talking man tries to seduce her."

"Don't talk dirty."

"Or sweep her off her feet, or whatever. And I feel girlishly shy and want a little time to think."

"Not away from me, you don't. I'm not letting you get off so easily."

"Then can we knock off the hard sell?" he asked, almost angrily. "Let's give it a chance, okay?"

"Ah, so you're admitting the possibility?"

"Anything is possible. In all honesty, I'm a little confused."

"Over the other woman?"

"That, too."

"Perhaps you'd better tell me about her."

"I'm in love with her," he said quickly, before concern for Cicily's feelings could stop him. There was a silence.

"Really, really in love with her?" she asked in a sad little voice.

"Really, really. For a long time."

Again she was silent, seemed to withdraw into herself. "But she is not in love with you," she said finally, hope in her voice.

"No."

"Then let's give it a chance, as you suggest. No more hard sell."

"It's a deal."

"But not if you go away and don't call or come over or ask me out. If you do that I'll have to chase you."

He laughed. "Tomorrow night?"

"I'll have to check my schedule," she said. Then, quickly: "I did. Okay."

He had never known a woman like her. She was so feminine that he sometimes found himself just gazing at her in admiring pleasure. She seemed to preen herself at such times, to become even more beautiful. He had little work to do, told himself he deserved a vacation, spent the afternoons, some mornings, every evening with her. Jolly Roger Smith and his wife, who had been absent on that first day, began to look at him covertly, questions in their eyes, for he seemed to be constantly at the Smith house or out with Cicily. In her small car they drove into the out-back of the island, up the hills, into quiet, flowery places, to lonely beaches. In such places she pumped him, set him talking, kept him talking, gave him no mercy, demanding all the memories he could dredge up about his childhood, his teens, his young manhood. And since it was impossible to speak of his childhood and his teens without mentioning Liz, he told her about the girl next door, about her sister, this last to lessen her suspicion, if she had any. But his attempt at subterfuge was, apparently, transparent.

"Liz Wilder is the one," she said one day, after they'd braved the surf of a disturbed Pacific, riding huge waves, rewarded themselves with a cold beer from a picnic hamper.

"What makes you think so?" he asked.

"The way you look when you talk about her." She sighed. "Well, she sounds like rough competition. I envy her, in a way, doing what she's doing. I wish I could do something like that. I think I'm brave enough, I just

don't have the skills. I'm a fine arts major. I can sew nicely and I'll be a whizz at making a nice home."

"Don't belittle yourself," he said.

"Well, your Liz complicates matters," she said. "We Smith women are honorable. Damn it, I can't ask you to write her a Dear John." She smiled. "Or would it be a Dear Jane? Not while she's out there fighting the war."

He threw himself backward onto the blanket and laughed. "Don't you laugh at me," she said in mock anger, hitting him lightly in the stomach. He pulled her atop him, closed her mouth with his. She answered the kiss and, in his arms, breasts crushed against his chest, went all soft and panty. When he broke the kiss she moaned lightly in protest, but he pushed her off and raised himself to one elbow.

"You are a twit," he said fondly, "a beautiful, warm-hearted twit. You're worrying about Liz and it's not her at all, it's me, and I'm not even so sure about that anymore."

Her smile lit her face, but wisely, she was silent.

"I'm a damned fool, Cicily," he said. "Here I've got the most beautiful girl in the world right next to me and I should be sorry for myself? I thought at first there might be a history of gentle insanity in that wonderful Smith family you're always talking about but I think you've convinced me." He fell silent and she still didn't speak, just beamed that smile at him. And he was thinking, well, if she's just having me on, just playing some silly little game, now's the time. "Well, aren't you going to say anything?"

She shook her head and then pushed him back and fell onto him, kissed him until *he* was panting slightly, then broke it off.

"Cicily has landed," he said, "and the situation is well in hand."

"Not in doubt?"

"Maybe just a smidgen of doubt," he said, "but for you, not for me. I doubt if you'll be getting the better end of the bargain."

"Don't worry about me," he said.

"We'll have to wait until after the war."

"I guess so. I've been thinking about that. Let's leave it open for the moment, huh? My dad has no grandkids. I'm his only chick. I'll have to figure out if it would be better to marry you now and start a child, and then in case the

unthinkable happens have the child, or whether or not it would be fair to you to have a wife, and maybe a child on the way, to worry about in Kwajalein. You'd have to go, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Well, we Smith women are strong. We've been navy wives for generations, back to John Paul Smith. When a Smith husband says, 'This is a thing I gotta do, little woman,' we grit our teeth and smile and pack the gunpowder. Or, in your case, the pen and ink. I wouldn't think of asking you not to go." She looked at him, eyes squinted. "Wouldn't do any good, would it?"

"I started it. I wouldn't feel right if I stopped, because a lot of men don't have a choice."

"Sure there wasn't a Smith in your family?"

In the midst of Christmas dinner, Mark and the three Smiths at the table, Cicily said, "I know you're both aware that I'm in love with Mark."

"I must admit," her mother said, "that we've entertained some suspicion."

"If you don't like it, blame it on Dad. He brought Mark to the house."

"Well, that depends," her mother said, while Jolly Roger Smith looked from one to the other woman, fork poised midway between plate and mouth.

"On what?" Cicily asked.

"On how Mark feels about you."

"Your cue, sir," Cicily said.

"She has promised to quit bullying me," he said, looking at the admiral.

"Only after we're married," she said.

"Sir," Mark said, "I've been planning to speak with you after the holidays. We're talking about marriage. I would have come to you for your permission, of course, but since little Miss Fix-it has jumped the gun, I'd like to have your opinion."

Smith said, "I've had plenty of time to think about it, to be pleased with the idea. How long did it take you to find out that she intended to marry you?"

Mark laughed. "She told me the first day I met her."

"Well," Admiral Smith chuckled, "Smith women know—"

"—what they want when they see it," Mark finished.

"I think it's wonderful," Mrs. Smith said, rising to kiss

her daughter, then to kiss Mark on the cheek. "Has Cicily decided when?" Then, realizing what she'd said, she flushed. "Oh, dear."

Mark laughed. "We're still talking about it."

"I can't really decide what's best," Cicily said seriously. "You men insist on fighting your wars and you put us women in a terrible position. It's the same question many men and women have faced in the last two years, but when it's applied to oneself it becomes rather more personal. If I don't marry Mark now, and he's killed, I'll have nothing. If I do marry him and he's killed, I'll have had at least something, and perhaps a baby." She beamed at her father. "A boy, I hope, Dad, and we'll name him Marcus Smith Fillmore. What do you think?"

"Approve of the name," Smith said. "Don't approve of the cold and calm way you talk about the possibility of Mark being killed."

"Bosh," she said. "Mother lived with the possibility all the time you were on sea duty. Smith women have lived with it through half a dozen wars. It's just plain common sense to consider all possibilities."

"If you don't mind," Mark said, "I'd like not to consider it too much."

"Perhaps the doomed man should have a say," Admiral Smith said. "How do you feel, Mark? I don't think I have to pretend that things are going to start moving shortly after the first of the year. Knowing my women, I don't think the sort of bash they'd want could be organized in such a short time."

His wife frowned. "If we only knew how long it would be before this, ah, next one is over, it might be easier to make plans."

The admiral laughed. "Don't ask me to call Tojo and ask him how hard he intends to defend the next one."

"There's only one thing to do," Cicily said. "Just ride with it." She looked at Mark. "You haven't said whether you think it's best to try to squeeze in a wedding between islands or wait until it's all over."

Mark chewed thoughtfully. He did not try to analyze the reasons behind his answer, but he would have occasion to wonder later on. At that moment, in a warm, friendly home, with a girl who bedazzled him, whose sharp mind intrigued him, he wanted nothing more than to say "Make it as soon as possible." But he didn't say that. He

may have been thinking of her mother, who would probably have been disappointed in a hasty wedding.

"Would it be wise to add another uncertainty to the situation?" he asked. "I'll be away much of the time, Cicily. And even though I don't like to think about it, the worst could happen. If it did, I think I'd like you to be free and unencumbered."

"You're saying wait," she said.

"Yes, I guess so."

"Do we have to make the decision final now?" she asked, not looking at him.

"No, we can talk about it."

It was one of about ten thousand subjects they covered in more or less detail in the days between Christmas and the end of the year. And then it was time to go. He watched still another invasion task force form up, move into the central Pacific.

And the United States came to know the names of more poetic-sounding islands, Mellu, Ennugarret, Ennubir, and Roi-Namur. The new 4th Division's 23rd Marines galloped across the island of Roi, a part of Kwajalein, the world's largest atoll, in an almost joyful if somewhat disorganized rout. For once, the naval bombardment had killed half the island's defenders. Nowhere in the Kwajalein atoll were there fortified positions to rank with the deadly installations of Tarawa. The 24th Regiment took Namur in three days. It was a joint army-Marine operation and the 7th Infantry Division hit Kwajalein island itself on the first of February, completing the mop-up in four days.

The 4th was no longer a boot division. They'd been blooded and had tasted blood, and although Roi-Namur was no Guadalcanal, definitely no Tarawa, they were cocky and ready for anything.

There was no time for Mark to return to Hawaii after Kwajalein, for the U.S. offensive was rolling. By the middle of February Mark was scratching his left foot (nothing he had found would cure the rot he'd picked up on the Canal) a bit to the northwest of Kwajalein, as terrible Tommy Watson's joint army-Marine task force boarded amphibious tractors. These were still prone to stall, and when they stalled they had a distressing tendency to sink. The force moved behind a curtain of naval fire to the beaches of the Eniwetok atoll—Engebi, Parry, Eniwetok.

They had begun to look the same, these sandy, coral atolls. Before the bombardment they were green with trees and afterward there was only desolation.

One of the major developments of early 1944 was a new weapons system developed for the express purpose of devastating Japan. They rolled off American assembly lines by the hundreds. The Japs would see them for the first time in June of 1944 over the steel mills of Yahata. The B-29 was a new bomber that dwarfed the old B-17's and the B-24's which, having a longer range than the Forts, had previously been the workhorses of the Pacific. The B-29 had a range of four thousand miles and a bomb capacity of twenty thousand pounds.

When the B-29 was first encountered by Japanese fighter pilots, they peeled off without attacking, stunned, for it seemed impossible that anything so big could fly.

In the long run, the B-29 would save Marine lives. For now, the very existence of the new bomber sent Marines toward beaches. The huge, four-motored instrument of death needed bases within reach of the supply lines radiating outward from Hawaii and within range of the Japanese home islands. Thus the stage was set for another island hop, westward this time, the line leading from the conquered Marshalls to the Marianas, a group of islands just fifteen hundred miles from Tokyo, well within the capacity of the Superforts. The islands were called Saipan, Tinian, and Guam.

It was an eventful year, a dramatic spring. The rapidly developing situation seemed to justify Mark's suggestion that his marriage to Cicily be postponed.

Vivia's USO unit continued to tour the more isolated bases. Liz's hospital ship stood off Kwajalein, filled her wards, then steamed toward the Hawaiian hospitals. She did not see Mark at Kwajalein.

In June, the cocky 4th Division was assigned an island that was to take its place in Marine lore alongside the Canal and Tarawa. Saipan, headquarters of the Japanese Central Pacific Fleet, was the target of a task force of eight hundred ships and 162,000 men. The biggest Jap base yet, Saipan was defended by almost thirty thousand Japanese, many of them veterans of fighting in China. With the 4th Division was the 2nd, rebuilt after its decimation at Tarawa. The old vets were saying that, once again, the good old 2nd had been given the toughie,

not a walkover like the 4th at Kwajalein. But they couldn't complain too much because the 4th was there too.

The *Solicitude* was there as well, and when the Marines took two thousand casualties on the first day Liz underwent another period of endless, sleepless, desperate, life-and-death work, her medical crew again performing miracles almost hourly. Marcie Evans was gone from the *Solicitude*, promoted to an assignment at a recuperation hospital unit in Samoa. Marcie was instrumental in giving Douglas the monkey his first flight, under the care of the Naval Transport Command. In a letter to Liz, mentioning the heat, the insects, the hardships, Marcie said, "God, I could sure use old Douglas." With a smile, Liz sent him on his way, carefully tagged. Douglas's fame had been spreading as nurses went from the hospital ship to other assignments and 1944 was to see him traveling all over the Pacific, his name tag recording his deeds of mercy.

Watching the war from her comfortable home on Oahu, Cicily Smith wrote to Mark religiously, making her letters light and gay. He had enough to worry about. She knew he had to be at Saipan, and some of her childhood religious feelings came back to her, resulting in nightly prayers for his safety. It was, she knew, one heck-of-a fight, involving three American divisions, two Marines and one army. The Japs rose to the challenge and sent out the fleet, losing 346 aircraft in the Marianas Turkey Shoot off Guam. Three of the few remaining Jap aircraft carriers went down in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Cicily began to think wistfully that it might just be over soon, but reason told her that the toughest fight of all was still ahead, the reduction of Jap pride and fighting ability through an invasion of the home islands. There were times when she felt she'd really be an old maid before the war ended.

Mark did not go ashore with the first assault waves on Saipan, and when the news of massive casualties reached staff officers on board ship, he felt guilty and got his ass on shore as quickly as possible, and into a grinding, bloody sameness. Battle seemed to have become his entire life. It was almost as if he'd never known anything but the sounds of it, the sights of it, the young men who could not believe it might happen to them and went forward into machine-gun fire. It went on and on and on, from mid-June into July, and in the final days a new horror

was added to the war when, backed into a pocket at Marpo Point, the Japs added something new. There were many Japanese civilians mixed in with the beleaguered troops and, urged on by the soldiers, men and women and children committed mass suicide by leaping from a cliff. The shocking acts reinforced a suspicion long held by American war planners. The closer the invading forces came to the Jap home islands, the more fierce and determined would be Japanese resistance.

Over sixteen thousand Americans were killed or wounded on Saipan, almost thirteen thousand of them Marines. To Mark, however, the ultimate tragedy was the spectacle of the bodies of Japanese civilians, young, old, male, female, smashed on the rocks at the foot of a cliff. He was sickened by it and by the sheer brutality of the fighting.

He'd first been tempted to join up with the 2nd Division, for there were men still with the 2nd whom he'd known on Tarawa, but a nagging superstitious feeling had been building in him since the death of Billy Gene Carnes on Guadalcanal. So he joined the 4th Division instead, at Hill 600, which the 4th called Hot Potato Hill. He saw as brisk a fight as he'd ever seen, and Hot Potato Hill did nothing to dispel his self-image as a Jonah. He considered, during one hot and sleepless night, getting to hell off the island, feeling for a little while as if his very presence gave the Japanese a will, an extra ability to inflict casualties.

He wanted to be at Guam. And he was there to record the valor of more Marines, missed the Tinian landing as he covered the last Japanese stand on Guam, during which the remaining defenders were almost literally pushed over a cliff into the sea. Then, scratching his left foot, trying out a new ointment given him by a navy doctor, he decided he'd had enough of it all. He had to see something other than atolls and death, than watching men being killed.

He deplaned in Hawaii and called Cicily and wept quietly as he heard her voice, her sweet, southern voice, telling him how many times she was going to kiss him in the first thirty minutes, telling him to park his carcass at the officers' club, have a drink, and she'd break speed records getting there. She did, and when she threw herself

into his arms a few junior officers whistled and cheered in envy.

He held her at arms' length and saw a stranger. The face was as beautiful as ever, the eyes as beautiful, but it all hit him with a jolt. He knew so little about her. And over her face there was superimposed that of Liz, with the look she had had after Tarawa. For a few terrible moments he felt himself ready to go over the edge. He knew Liz Wilder as he'd known no other girl, had known her from the time she was born and he seemed to be crying out to her, to be wondering what he was doing with this vibrant, auburn-haired young girl in his arms. Then it passed, and he smiled.

FIFTEEN

HORROR, repeated, lessens in impact. The face created by Boris Karloff in the movie *Frankenstein* scared a generation into sleeping with heads tucked under the covers, despite a record heat wave, but it would become little more than a cartoon character as the years passed. Death, itself, loses its power to frighten as age makes it inevitable. A mutilated body, however, bears a special kind of horror. The pulsing organs exposed by terrible rending forces could be one's own, and under each skin flows the same easily spilled red, lies the same fragile bone.

Early in her nursing career Liz Wilder had made herself a promise. Seeing that some nurses became hardened to the suffering of others, she promised herself that she would never forget that each patient was an individual, suffering very real pain, and that no amount of exposure to sickness, hurt, suffering, and death would cause her to lose compassion.

Yet there were times when one had to blank one's mind, to look only at the wound itself and not at the pale face dulled by morphine, or twisted in pain that defied painkiller. There were so many of them. During that spring and summer of '44 the *Solicitude* raced back and forth from the central Pacific to the Hawaiian hospitals, pausing at Pearl Harbor only long enough to offload casualties, to refuel and resupply, then race back to still an-

other blood-stained atoll. And, for a while, she had to harden herself. There were just too many of them.

That it made her a better surgical nurse was a gain, but she could not forget her earlier resolve. So when the spate of work was over, the wards filled with postoperative and other patients, she would spend what little spare time there was writing letters for men without arms, reading the scrawled words of a man whose throat had been ruined by shrapnel, and feeding cold beer to the burn cases.

"Intake of fluids is important to a burn patient," she would explain carefully to those who badgered her to put them on the beer list.

When Douglas the mascot came home, traveling in style under the care of the Navy Transport Service, she would welcome and hold him, sometimes dozing off with the silly little monkey in her arms. Then, soon, he'd be off on his travels, which were becoming more and more celebrated, bringing comfort to a sister nurse somewhere in the ever-widening zone of American-held islands.

Teased by Dr. Nick Carew about the mascot, a few of the nurses tried to analyze Douglas's role. Liz told Nick about Douglas's original owner, Lucy Anne James, and how she'd asked Ethel Johnston to take him off Corregidor.

"I guess everyone has to have something," a nurse said. "Something to cling to."

"I volunteer," E. O. Gardner said.

"Something that won't cling back," said the nurse.

"An outlet," E.O. said. "Like . . . every good soldier bitches. That's an outlet. Or like writing 'Kilroy was here' everywhere they go."

"Or like drawing pictures of Smoo sticking his head and hands up over a wall on any surface that'll take chalk or pencil or something," someone offered.

"I guess Douglas is our Smoo," Liz said. "Our Kilroy."

"For a while I had little friends," E.O. said. "They didn't like the hours so they went back to their own planet."

"Or you grew up," Liz teased.

Such talk sessions were possible only on the trips out from Pearl Harbor. And it was on those trips that they used E.O.'s record player, often repaired by a skilled ex-radio repairman in the ship's crew. E.O. had managed to

steal, buy, or borrow some Armed Forces Radio discs made by Glenn Miller's Army Air Corps Band and it was . . . ah, fine stuff. A big, crisp, professional-sounding band with new tunes and new arrangements of old ones that set feet to tapping and people to humming.

E.O. had become a valued member of Nick Carew's team. He was great at performing necessary small emergency aid procedures on men waiting their turns⁶ on the operating table. He could set an I.V. with the best of the nurses and no longer winced when he had to jam a needle deeply into a man's arm. To Liz, he was something very special. She'd seen him in action many times and he was one of the rare ones, the compassionate ones who seemed to have the ability to say the right little word at the right time to a badly wounded man. He reminded her of Vivia. He, like her sister, would always retain a youthful enthusiasm, a vitality that seemed to lift everyone's spirits.

"You will make one helluva fine doctor, E.O.," she told him, and Nick Carew agreed.

"By the time this war is over," he said, "I'll be too old for medical school." But he worked and learned. He was in a good place to learn.

The *Solicitude*, all beds filled, steamed home from Saipan, busted an engine shaft a day out of Pearl, limped in, and was laid up for a few days. She was, however, given priority position at the yards. Her medical staff was told that the unexpected liberty in Hawaii would be brief. Everyone scattered to take advantage of what time they had.

Since the day after Tarawa, the relationship between Liz and Nick had mellowed into a sort of mutual admiration. They were a team, they worked well together, and they were friends. Not once in the following months did either of them mention that day at Tarawa, and not once did either of them make any attempt at reviving that terrible moment of healing passion. It was as his friend and colleague that Nick asked her to have dinner with him, that first night back in Honolulu, and it was as such that she accepted.

Mark's letters had been sporadic during the past few months and held, she felt, a different tone. No longer did he make references to his love for her. It was the old Mark, old big brother Mark. She loved hearing from him. She suspected he was back in the islands, with the

Marines. She thought she might be able to make some inquiries. She wanted to see him. There had been times when she had regretted her words, when she even hungered for the sight of him. Sometimes she went so far as to dream about the special taste of his kiss, the feel of his arms around her. The incident with Nick Carew had faded, could be explained, no longer had a vast impact on her feelings. She wanted to kick herself for having let it force her into hurting Mark. But the damage could be remedied when she saw him again.

And she would see him again, of that she was certain. His was a dangerous job and she suspected that he made it more dangerous, for his reports were so vital, so realistic, that he must always position himself directly on the front lines. But such was her confidence in him that she was sure he would not be killed.

As for loving him? She often thought of it. She missed him. When she was with him she was content. Contentment might not be bliss, but many had to settle for less. Mark wore well. She couldn't think of anyone she'd rather be with, talk to. He was as solid as savings bonds, as dependable as sulfa powder or the Seabees, as pleasing as a new permanent. And yet, having known many girls in love, Liz could not bring herself to say the things girls in love usually said, to talk endlessly about the virtues of their knights. Why not? She didn't know. Was it because Mark didn't thrill her? Looking back, she wondered if she'd ever been thrilled. And then she had this thought: Maybe good old dependable Liz was so solid-minded and nonflighty because she was just a little bit undersexed? The lack of a man in her life bothered her very, very little. The one sexual experience she'd had, that wild release with Nick Carew, had been overwhelming, but she suspected that the impact had been more emotional than sexual. Maybe she was undersexed.

She would not have said she was confused. It was not in her nature to be confused, only to be undecided. And good old solid-minded Liz knew there was plenty of time.

So Liz was quite unprepared when, dining with Nick Carew, she heard a tinkling little laugh and looked up to see a cuddly little redhead coming toward her on the arm of good old dependable Mark Fillmore.

There are times when an incident can trigger old memories and instill in an adult a reaction that has been ex-

perienced many years before, perhaps as a child. In that brief instant Liz Wilder was transported back to the age of twelve and the girl on Mark's arm was one Mary Sue Moore, a cute little redhead, and the object of Liz's unrelenting and pitiless hatred. The intensity of her reaction surprised her. She knew herself better than that. It was just an unguarded reversion to times long past. It was not really jealousy, was it?

But he was going to walk right past her table without seeing her, and that was too much. His attention was so focused on Little Miss Charming that he wasn't seeing anything but her. When Liz reached up and tugged his sleeve, he didn't realize what was happening.

"Hey, fella," she said.

He turned, the little frown on his face fading, leaving a blank, shocked look, and then a huge smile. "Liz!" He didn't even think. He pulled away from Cicily and Liz rose and he threw a bear hug around her. Liz saw the startled look on the girl's face.

"Hey, have mercy on the ribs," Liz gasped. He held her at arms' length, grinning widely. And then he remembered. "Liz, this is Cicily. Cicily, I've told you about Liz, an old and dear friend."

Then it was Liz's turn to be dazed, to forget her manners, as if Nick Carew didn't exist, for the word *friend* seemed to vibrate around in her head and suddenly she was learning new things about Liz Wilder. When she did remember, Nick was already extending his hand to Mark. She said, "Mark Fillmore, Dr. Nick Carew. I've told you about him." And then more formalities, Nick giving Cicily an admiring smile. Then stalemate.

Nick, the only one of the foursome who was unaware of the conflicting forces, broke the silence. "Hey, why don't you join us? Big table, plenty of room."

Mark looked at Cicily who, with a pleasant smile, said, "We'd love to."

And it was Nick who broke another awkward silence, complimenting Mark on a story from one of the islands. Then the men were talking war and Cicily was sipping at a drink and examining her competition and not liking what she saw at all. A mature and very pretty woman with character in her face, a woman more like Mark than she was, might be a woman to be feared. Feared even if Mark *did* say he was no longer in love with her. Cicily

could not get one thought out of her mind: Why didn't I marry him in December?

And the really tough part of it was, damnit, that the women liked each other. Cicily asked about Liz's work and Liz talked, and then Cicily was telling a story about an amusing incident, and when it was time to go to the powder room they were chatting away like old friends. Their eyes still searched, secretly, for faults. They found few.

Liz and Mark compared notes on Vivian. Mark had received one brief V-Mail letter. On the home front, Mark's mother was ill, but recovering, Liz's folks were just fine, just fine. But it wasn't the most successful of all dinner parties, for there was growing in Liz a feeling she did not quite understand—a hurt, an anger, a hope that this pretty, charming, nice girl was just another girl. And after all, she herself was to blame. She was the one who'd said she was not in love with him.

And there was a dulled confusion in Mark's mind. He told himself that the confusion was merely the result of having loved Liz for so long. He'd never quite, as the saying went, got over her, but he was truly in love with Cicily, wasn't he?

"Do you ride?" Cicily asked, as the meal was nearing its end.

"Cable cars, automobiles, airplanes, and ships." Liz smiled.

"We can teach you, can't we, Mark?" Cicily asked. She was a Smith. She attacked a problem head-on. This lovely woman had materialized into her life and back into Mark's, and it was evident that Liz was not in love with the doctor. She had eyes only for Mark, and if a Smith woman couldn't meet the competition head-on and win, then she didn't deserve the prize.

"Huh?" Mark asked. "Oh, sure." Thinking, Good God.

"I think I'll reluctantly pass," Liz said.

"But you must come up to the house. Mark's told all of us so much about you. My mother and father would love to meet you. We'll swim and there's the beach—"

"I really don't know how long we'll be in port," Liz said.

"Well, Mark can keep in touch with you," Cicily said, thinking, There, Mister, there's your excuse, your permission. Now let's see what you're made of.

"Well . . . we're staying on board, Mark," Liz said. He nodded.

"And now, Marky-warky," Cicily said, being deliberately cloying, "I think we'd better go."

"I'll be in touch," he said. He rose, claimed his check and Nick's, over Nick's protest, and walked away, Cicily looking back to wave, clinging to his arm.

Marky-warky? Liz was thinking. *Marky-warky?*

And, in her bunk, damn, damn, what was happening to her? Was she the sort of perverse woman who wanted a man only when she found he was attractive to other women? Wanted a thing only when it became unavailable to her?

With the ship under repair, there were no duty hours to pull, and the city was there for exploring. She'd never had much time in Honolulu, yet, somehow, the city held no attractions for her that next day. She watched other nurses dress in their blues and go off excitedly, told Nick she just wanted to stay aboard and loaf, but all the time, admitting it to herself, she hoped Mark would come.

Sure enough, good old dependable Mark arrived just before lunch, joining her in the officers' mess. At first he seemed to be the same old Mark.

"Saw the *Solicitude* offshore at Kwajalein," he said. "I couldn't make it. You loaded her fast out there."

And thus it went. No mention of the pretty little girl. No mention of what she'd said off Tarawa. Just old Mark talking to old Liz. She'd always been sort of a sounding board for him. They lingered over coffee and the room emptied, messboys cleaning up, bringing more coffee.

"Do you have any idea where the next one will be?" she asked. "The way they're pushing the repairs on the ship they seem to want us out of here fast."

"I don't know exactly," he said. "West. Into the Philippines maybe. But I think not, not for the Marines, or at least not many of them. Didn't I see a map in the lounge?"

"We got the B-29's the bases they need," he said. "Saipan, Guam, Tinian. And you can see how far we've come. There are two main lines of assault, from Hawaii, down into the Gilberts and Marshalls, and up to the Marianas, is one line. The other comes out of Australia, up through New Guinea, along the north coast, pointed directly toward Mindanao in the Philippines. If I know Old Mac, he's chaffing at the bit. He wants to get back into the Phil-

ippines more than anything else in the world. So my guess is that the next big arena will be there. The northern line of assault could veer southward and put all the central Pacific forces into the Philippine area, but I don't think so. I think they'll stick with the two-pronged attack because it's one helluva long haul for the pilots from the Marianas—from Saipan, say, to the Jap home islands."

He tapped the map. "I think we'll go here." She bent closer to see the small dots in the blue ocean area. "The Volcano and Bonin islands. Halfway between the Marianas and Tokyo."

"I remember asking *why*, once, why we had to lose so many lives taking places like Tarawa. I think I'm beginning to understand."

"We'll take the Volcano and Bonin islands for the same reasons," he said. "A step closer to the home islands. Bases, for both planes and ships. But when you look at the map, you'll see why the Philippines are so important. Take the Philippines back and you're between the Jap and all of Southeast Asia and the Netherlands Indies. Then you island hop northward through the Ryukyu Islands."

She looked closely. The Ryukyus showed as Japanese territory, part of the home islands. She shuddered. She'd heard the stories of the civilians on Saipan, knew of the Jap's terrible determination to defend his own.

"Where will you go?" she asked, trying to shake off a feeling of dread.

"Probably with the Marines," he said. "Although it's going to be one hell of a story when Mac goes back to Manila."

"Thanks for the lesson in strategy," she said.

"Anytime."

"We're still uncivilized in the navy," she said. "No booze on American ships. I can offer you a shot of medical alcohol. E.O. mixes it with grape juice." She smiled. "One sip blows your skull off."

He laughed. "I can do better than that."

But even in a bar there was still no mention of the pretty little girl, or the words Liz had spoken. When it came, it came obliquely. "By the way, Cicily was sincere in that invitation. Why don't you and the doctor come on up this weekend?"

"I'm not sure of Nick's plans," she said with hidden meaning.

"I see." He seemed to muse for a moment, undecided. "Well, you can come, then. They'll love to have you."

"I think not," she said. "Third wheel, and all that." She was giving him an opening. He sidestepped it with a nod.

"Yeah, I guess so," he said, so lightly, so casually that it was a shock to her. She turned her head, then looked down lest he see the quick and unexpected glaze of tears. So that's how it was.

"Well, I guess I'll toddle on back to the ship," she said, draining her glass.

"I'll escort you."

"No, no need. You run along. And keep your head down, do you understand? Don't try to be a hero."

"Not a chance of that."

He walked with her to the street. "Get you a taxi?"

"No," she said. "It's nice. I'll walk."

She did not see him as, watching her back, seeing how proud and straight she looked in her dress blues, he raised his arm, opened his mouth. Nor did she hear him, for when it came out it was a whisper. "Liz?" Then the moment was past.

She saw him once more before the ship sailed. Another summer had gone, sweeping along on the wave of events, fall just around the corner at home, only the same balmy weather in the Pacific. He came on board while they were restocking the medical supplies. She managed to get away for only a few minutes. He had come to say good-bye.

"Can you tell me where?" she asked. "Maybe we'll cross paths out there."

"The southern prong," he said.

"The Philippines?"

"I didn't say that," he said.

"I won't be seeing you for a long time, will I?"

"They're big islands."

"Predictions?" she asked.

"Long and deadly and bloody."

"Mark, you know we have nurses in Jap prison camps in the Philippines."

"Your Lucy Anne, the girl who owned the monkey," he said.

"If she's still alive."

"There was a picture—"

"I saw it, from a Jap newspaper, showing some of the

girls nursing civilians at Santo Tomas. Maybe Lucy Anne is there."

"Liz, you've got something on your mind, haven't you?"

"If she's alive, then when we take Manila, I'd like very much to be there, to have that damned little monkey there. I think that would do more than anything to show her, and all the others, that we didn't forget them."

"Not much chance of your getting there," he said. "So, okay, I think I anticipate you. Give me the little beast and I'll see what I can do."

"You take good care of him," she said, standing in the doorway of her quarters, gently handing Douglas and his autographed name tag over to him.

"Liz," he said, deadly serious, "I'll take care of him, but I'll be damned if I'm going to hand-carry a stuffed monkey."

"He won't like it hidden away in a bag," she protested.

"Then you go carry him into General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters and say, 'Hey, Doug, meet your namesake.'"

The *Solicitude* angled into the central Pacific, destination still unknown, and when orders did come, she turned southward, making Liz think their destination, like Mark's, was the Philippines. But the ship joined up with a task force. Following the usual naval barrage, to become known later on as the least effective prelanding barrage of the war, the reinforced 1st Marine Division hit Peleliu Island. Waiting for them on shore were units of one of Japan's crack divisions, the 14th, an old and fiercely proud outfit armed with tanks, the new 200mm rocket launchers, mortars, artillery, and a commandant who did not waste his forces in senseless, drunken *banzai* attacks.

For the first time, the *Solicitude* began to fill with men from the same outfit, and there was talk about a terrible hill that the Marines called Bloody Nose Ridge. A chain-smoking young lieutenant with his toes blown off, lucky not to have lost an entire leg, sat moodily against a bulkhead.

"Half of them," he said to E.O. Gardner. "I lost half my men."

He was wrong. The 1st Marines had only 44 percent of their men on their feet when they were relieved.

"What really pisses me off," said a PFC with a

shrapnel fragment lodged under his collarbone, "is that that damned MacArthur and the frigging army are going to get all the headlines. The folks back home won't even hear about fucking Peleliu, just about old baggy pants shooting off his mouth." He made a face. "Ah have return-ed," he said. E.O. caught him as he passed out from blood loss.

SIXTEEN

AFTER MacArthur waded ashore on Philippine soil again as he'd promised, Mark got bogged down in trying to cover an extended naval action and, although it was fascinating to be in on the action, to be there aboard Bull Halsey's flagship and see the huge carriers and battle-wagons plunging through choppy seas, to hear of the great victories, it was not Mark's kind of action. It took place over hundreds of square miles of sea and he felt as if he were merely a spectator. Despite his feeling, his story, which correctly stated that the Japanese Navy would no longer be a significant force after the Philippines, got worldwide attention.

Nor was the land campaign his sort of war. Unlike the Napoleonic assaults of the Marines, it was widespread, too diversified for one man to cover or even understand fully. He doubted that even the high brass understood. But it was, apparently, a good plan. And the year neared an end with the Sixth Army massing for the Luzon campaign.

He did discover something about himself during his long and often unrewarding stay aboard ships, around headquarters, sometimes in the field. He was at heart an elitist. His heart was with the Marines, and rumors among Bull Halsey's staff that something big was cooking up north with the gyrenes made him restless. He went out seeking and found another group of elitists, the men who formed the various units of the 11th Airborne Division. Their uniforms were different, but their thinking was similar to the proud and fierce determination of a hardened Marine division such as the 2nd. Pissed? Man, you've never seen anyone as pissed as the 11th 503rd parachute

RCT when they got word they'd have to walk or swim to Mindoro Island instead of hitting it from the air, but they did their job.

He thought about going home for Christmas. Funny, he considered Hawaii home now. And home was represented by the smiling, youthful face of a Smith woman. But things were beginning to pick up and, after all, Mac's people were damned nice to him. Those boys in the U.S. 1st Corps, getting ready for the Lingayen Gulf landings, were Americans too, just like Marines, and they had some tough fighting ahead. He didn't think he was the only newsman who could write it, but he figured he owed them something. Then, too, there was that furry little animal who was always with him, packed away carefully in his bags. After all, he had made a promise to Liz.

He had Christmas dinner with infantrymen, in the open, talked with them, heard about the girls back home, the things they planned to do after the war. Soon some of those men died on the central plains of Luzon in the big push to retake Clark Field.

Since he was known as a man who could keep his mouth shut, he was as well informed about military plans as most of the high brass, and even though he continued to hear rumors that the Marines were getting ready for a big one up north, he stayed around. The island assaults might have been more spectacular, more deadly, more dramatic, but the Philippines was one of the bigger stories of the Pacific war. So he stayed through Christmas, through the beginning of what many hoped would be the last year of the war. The U.S. forces had the momentum both in Europe and in the Pacific.

He began to feel a bit paranoid, like many of the men who fought in the Pacific, when Europe continued to dominate in dramatic events, but he kept plugging away and it was his releases, as much as anything, that reminded America that there was a war on in the Pacific too. Now allied forces were pushing toward the Rhine and the German frontier, and even he had to admit that was more appealing to the imagination than the taking of a few hundred more yards of Philippine soil.

By late January, he'd had it. The rumors were more definite now. The next big Marine landing was going to be in February. He told a colonel pulling out. The colonel

frowned. "It's going to be a big story when we get back into Manila."

"Well," Mark said, "I guess there'll be plenty of men there."

"Back to the Marines, eh?"

"Well, you know," Mark said. "I guess I'm still, after all, an admirer of General Lee."

That usually stopped them, but the colonel didn't give up. "Like the fast, bulldozing assault, do you?" He thought for a minute. "There's one coming up you might like to see before you go."

Mark listened. And he remembered Douglas the monkey and his promise to Liz, and for a moment her face was as clear as if she'd been standing there. Chances were about one in twelve she'd be on the *Solicitude* at the next Marine landing. To see her. . . .

Not only did it have an appeal, it would serve a purpose. "Colonel, do you have any idea whether there are navy nurses there?"

"We know some of them are at Santo Tomas over by Manila, being used to treat civilian prisoners of war, but, yes, there's a damned good chance there'll be a few at Los Banos."

He stayed. He was back with an elite force and they were training for a special mission, a mission of mercy with dramatic potential. One of the more infamous Jap prison camps was located on a piece of land that had a special meaning to Americans because of the gallant last stand made there early in the war. Corregidor.

He linked up with the 503rd Parachute Combat Team, tried his damndest to talk people into letting him make a couple of practice jumps so he could go in with the 503rd, was politely but flatly refused. The next best thing, he felt, was to find a sympathetic ear.

He found it in a rather sloppy second lieutenant, over a bottle of warm beer. The lieutenant's name was Earl Tanza. From Knoxville, Tennessee, he was a platoon leader in the 511th Parachute Regiment. Mark often wondered, during those days before the unit loaded into rattling, paint-peeling C-46's and flew toward Corregidor, how the hell this man had ever received a commission and how he hung onto it. The answer to one of the questions was that Tanza had a good college record for two years and had qualified for Officer's Candidate School,

had, in his own words, squeaked through by the skin on his ass.

Earl Tanza was tall and lanky, his uniform hung on his spare frame, shirt blossoming out over his belt, pants bloused sloppily into scuffed boots, a direct contrast to the spit and polish image of paratroopers. His men loved him. Not that he was soft on them. Seeing him in action in the brief period of training before the combat jump, Mark revised his opinion. Sloppily dressed, yes. But sharp. Very sharp, and in his soft-spoken, southern way, a master of psychology. Without even seeming to push he had his platoon geared, ready, eager, as sharp as Mark had ever seen any unit, even in the 2nd Marines.

"Earl," Mark said, after about the fourth bottle of warm beer, "any way you can smuggle me on the plane?"

"Sure. Be glad to have you."

"With a parachute?"

"Not a chance," Tanza said. "You'd break every bone in your body."

"It can't be that tough."

"Ever jump from the top of a twelve-foot wall?"

"Not lately."

"Maybe onto a rock?"

"Okay," Mark said. "But you'd let me come along for the ride?"

"Sure."

"Without authorization from a higher officer?"

"What can they do? They can court-martial me and I'll spend the rest of the war in a cushy jail."

"Earl, there's something else."

"Shoot, Luke, you're loaded."

"Intelligence has reason to think there might be a couple of navy nurses at Los Banos. I've got something that belonged to a navy nurse at the start of the war and I'm interested in getting it back to her as soon as possible. You wanta take it with you?"

"Depends on what it is," the lanky lieutenant said.

"Come on over to my quarters," Mark said. "I got a half pint of bourbon." And over bourbon, which, on top of the warm beer, began to make for some little disorientation in both of them, Mark pulled Douglas from his bag.

"Jesus H. Christ," Tanza said. "You're asking me to make a combat jump carrying a bloomin' teddy bear?"

"It's a monkey," Mark said wisely, holding Douglas's

tail out to full length. He told the story of Douglas and his owner, nurse Lucy Anne James.

"What if she isn't there?"

"Give him to whoever is there. Tell her she's to hold him for Lucy Anne."

"You tell my men I'm jumping with a friggin' stuffed animal in my pack—"

"I won't," Mark said.

Earl Tanza examined Douglas, his head nodding uncontrollably and his eyes blinking an effort to focus. "Been around, hasn't he?"

"He's got a lot of special meaning to a lot of nurses," Mark said. "I promised one of 'em, Liz Wilder, I'd see that he was delivered."

"Well, we can't break a promise to a nurse, can we?"

They staged at a newly repaired airfield, quiet, tense, laden down with their equipment. Mark boarded a C-46 with Earl Tanza, was given a small, canvas-sling seat at the front, watched the men sitting quietly, some talking, some quietly pursuing their own thoughts. A man jumped when a starter whined and one of the plane's motors roared, coughed, caught. As the C-46 rattled, shook, began to roll, Mark knew why they were called buckets of bolts. Once airborne, the lieutenant unbuckled, stood up.

"Is everybody happy?" he yelled over the roar and rattle of the plane. The men responded in good voice. It was almost impossible to hear. The door was off, wind rushing past the opening. Tanza stood in the door, both hands clutching the sides, his face rippling in the hurricane of air.

It was a fairly short flight, seemingly only minutes before Tanza ordered his men to stand and hook up. The clamps on static lines clinked over the cable running down the center of the overhead, lines were jerked, hard, to be sure they were secure. That static line jerked the main chute out of its pack. Go out the door with it unhooked and you fall free to depend on the smaller reserve chute strapped to the chest.

"Equipment check," Tanza yelled, and men faced each other, checked each other's equipment, turned, checked backpack and static line.

"Sound off for equipment check" came the order and, in strong young voices, it came: "One okay. Two okay." The men wore tightly buckled steel helmets, jump pants

with pockets specially designed to carry their equipment and weapons, M-1 rifles strapped to their sides in cushioning olive-drab covers. A warning light went on and the word was passed. "Close up. Close it up."

Tanza, his static line attached, was standing in the door. He turned his head, yelled something that went unheard, but Mark caught it by reading his lips. "I see it."

Suddenly the plane bounced as if it had hit a rough spot in the road and flak began to make black holes in the sky around them. A crewman was slapping Earl Tanza on the rump as the jump light came on and they went out, the long, double line coiling past Mark's position, those on the starboard side of the plane having to make a circuit to get to the open door, going out as if they were trying to climb on each other's backs, so quick that it was over in seconds and the plane lurched upward, relieved of its burden, static lines hanging out the open door and cracking as the windflow hit them with hurricane force. He tried to see but there was only dark, forbidding land and water in the distance. He got up to go back to the door and was stopped by the aircrewman.

He was sorry he'd come. He couldn't see a damned thing. Better to be back at headquarters where he could hear the radio reports. He went forward again, pushed into the pilot's cabin. "Can you see anything?" he yelled.

"I think we dropped 'em a little short," the copilot said worriedly.

As Earl Tanza stood in the door, his face rippling, he didn't have a chance to worry. There was water below him and he ran through his mind the procedure for a water landing: Unstrap here and here and hit the quick-release button on the T-5 parachute and with hands up over your head fall through the harness, being damned sure you've unhooked the crotch straps. Hit the water and get out from under the chute so it won't entangle you and drown your ass. There was the island up front and even as he felt the slap on his buttock and saw the jump light out of the corner of his eye he knew they were too far out. But the flyboys usually knew what they were doing. Maybe there was one helluva onshore breeze? He tensed, fell-leaped, head down, feet stiff and together, arms folded over the reserve to feel the momentary buffeting, to catch a glimpse of the sharp deadly edge of the plane's tail. And then the breathtaking jerk of opening shock,

looking up to the canopy. It was a beauty, fully deployed, men all above him opening and beginning to drift.

As always, they'd gone out low, and as he looked down the water was coming up at him with speed, and it *was* water, not sandy beach or pebbles or brush or rock. He threw his weight onto the forward straps, trying to slip toward land. First out, he was the farthest from the land and the damned flyboys had goofed, after all. He'd go in at least fifty yards offshore and into water over his head, sure as shit. He assessed quickly the chances of some of them hitting the land. Some would. Then time was gone and he went through the drill—unstrap, hit the quick-release. Maybe he went too soon. He shot down out of the harness, the canopy, relieved of its weight, falling off, ballooning to the side, carried by the slight onshore breeze. He hit the water like a blivet, went deep, deep, came up fighting for air and weighted down by his gear, including the soaking wet stuffed monkey in his backpack. Men were still in the air and the guns on the shore were beginning to take a toll. A man went into the water up ahead of him without bailing out and he thought, momentarily, of trying to swim to the man's aid, because he was still in his harness and the canopy fell right on top of him, floating there. He watched. He saw a man jerk in the air as bullets found him and then there was a series of little thunking splashes around him. Machine-gun fire. He couldn't see much on the beach. He could hear. The Japs were back from the little beach, and were pouring it to the last men in the air and to those who'd had the doubtful luck to hit land. But the air off to the left was full of chutes, going down on target.

He concentrated on staying alive. He began to make slow progress to the beach, considered trying to remove his boots and shed his pack, but got a mouthful of salt water and decided, since he was so close, to just float in. There was no surf, only tiny ripples on the calm water. He could see dead men on the rocky beach. But some of them had made it into the cover of rocks and trees and the sound of the good old M-1 was mixed with Jap small-caliber fire. Overhead, more men piled out in their camouflaged pattern chutes and started down.

He felt solidity under his feet and began to bounce, wade, to shore. The machine gun came at him again and he ducked under and held his breath for as long as he

could, hearing the thumping impact of lead into water. Then he had to breathe.

He fell as he ran from the surf, rolled, came to his feet and made for some rocks, a Jap machine gunner playing chase with him. He dived, hit his elbow on a rock and yelled, but he had cover.

"You hit, Lieutenant?" a man yelled, crouched behind a rock, M-1 still smoking.

"Just shoot, son," Tanza ordered, surprised at the calm in his voice. He was just so damned glad to be alive that he seemed paralyzed, but there was a brisk little firefight underway. He pulled a waterproof map from his thigh pocket and took a look. "How many made it?" he asked the nearest man.

"Don't know. Saw about a dozen down along the beach. Some of 'em went into the water."

"Don't I know it," Tanza said. "Well, we go that a'way," he said. "Pass the word. We're gonna hit it a lick and move out."

He made a weaving, diving, rolling advance, sometimes up front, sometimes with others out front. A man took out a machine-gun nest with a grenade, dying even as he tossed it. And then they were a bit inland and there were other troopers on the left flank and it got interesting for a while.

When he had a chance to count his men he found he'd lost about 30 percent. There were enough left to accomplish the mission. Other units were moving out to do their own jobs and his was straight ahead. He didn't get there easily and he lost more men along the way, but the Japs were being taken out a pocket at a time and then there it was—Los Baños. He wondered what he'd find, didn't put it past the Japs to have tried to kill everyone there. He rushed it, ready for anything, and found another unit there ahead of him. Men who'd surrendered 'way back in 1941 were ganging up around grinning, strutting troopers and yelling their heads off. He put his men into a formation and marched in through a gate in a barbed wire, and the ragged, skinny, deliriously happy poor bastards began to whoop at them and pound them on the back and ask questions.

He singled out a thin, distinguished man who looked like an officer. The man extended his hand, eyes glinting

with tears. "Welcome to Los Banos, Lieutenant. Glad you're not going to have to stay as long as we did."

"Sir," he said, sure the man was an officer, "could you tell me where the hospital is?"

"Such as it is, yes."

"Navy nurses there?" He had to yell to make himself heard over the cheers, laughter, yells, as the troopers were swarmed over by a mass of scarecrows in ragged remnants of clothing. He got the idea. Yes, there were three nurses at the hospital. He told his men to cool it and went off. The tropical heat had dried him long since and the rains had wetted him and he hadn't even had a chance to check out the damned little monkey.

The hospital was a ramshackle wooden structure and, sure enough, there was a woman standing on the stoop, waving, weeping. She looked thin and pale. When he approached she ran to meet him, threw her arms around him, kissed him.

"God bless, God bless," she kept saying as he gently disentangled himself and held her at arms' length. "Oh, God, at last."

"Is there a nurse here named Lucy Anne James?" he asked.

"You know Lucy Anne?" the girl asked, beaming, weeping at the same time. "She's in the ward. Just this way."

She led the way. He saw a weed-thin woman in a makeshift white uniform, apron atop, bending over a bed. Her hair was long, dark, tousled.

"Lucy Anne, Lucy Anne," the girl cried, "they're here."

Lucy Anne looked up with a smile. Her face was gaunt, but she was still an attractive woman.

"Lucy Anne?" Tanza asked.

"Yes."

"I have something for you." He began to take off his pack. The nurse who'd shown him in took his carbine and held it gingerly while he put the pack on the foot of a bed. A sick man looked on with bright, feverish eyes. He found the monkey. It was a bit damp, still. He held the little animal by the tail, noting that the waterproofing over the tag was holding.

"What?" Lucy Anne asked, her head cocked. "I don't understand."

Well, that was war, he thought. Breaking his ass to run

a silly errand for nothing. He'd been led to believe that the foolish little animal had a special meaning.

"I was told to tell you that this here animal was sent to you by Lieutenant Liz Wilder and all the other navy nurses in the Pacific on behalf of Ethel Johnston."

"Ethel?" She seemed dazed as she took the monkey, glanced at the name tag. "My God," she whispered, sitting down weakly on the side of the bed. "My God." And then she was reading the various inscriptions and when she looked up she was weeping with silent tears. She clutched the animal to her breast and rocked back and forth. "Oh, my God. They were all thinking of me. All of them. Oh, my God."

There was no shortage of news coverage when Lucy Anne James and her fellow nurses and Douglas and a boatload of other prisoners of war landed at Pearl Harbor. Douglas was to become one famous monkey, and his career was not over.

"I'm going home," Lucy Anne James told the reporters, "but my sister nurses are still out there. He'd want to be with them."

Lucy Anne did not get to meet Lieutenant Liz Wilder. The *Solicitude* was at work. And when the Naval Transport Command delivered a slightly bedraggled stuffed monkey to the ship there was a considerable interlude before Lieutenant Liz Wilder had a chance to look at the latest inscription put on the tag by Lucy Anne and the other released prisoners of war. The *Solicitude* was taking on casualties off the shore of a two-and-a-half by five-mile island that reminded her of a flat, burned pork chop. Volcanic ash in the wounds was causing the doctors extra problems.

SEVENTEEN

GAYLORD the Great lost his voice during a show in a brand-new, raw timber USO club near Hollandia, in New Guinea. Just as he was offering to cut off Vivian's, ah, torso, and present it to some lucky man, he opened his mouth and couldn't say anything. Then he looked around, puzzled, and sank to the floor as if his bones had turned to

water, folding quietly as Art Damling put down his accordion and rushed to him. A couple of army medics carried him away. The show went on. Afterward, Vivia and Damling learned that he was dead. His heart had simply stopped. There had seemed to be no pain, only that puzzled, wondering expression.

It was not the same, after that. They carried on, for the year was nearing an end and they'd been out a long, long time. The tour was winding down and Vivia had pulled strings with some brass to hang on a little longer and she often wondered if that had killed poor old Gay, the extra shows, the endless travel.

"He wouldn't have had it any other way," Art Damling told her, as they gave it up and began to organize transport back toward the east. "He loved every minute of it. You know as well as I do that he was all for staying. He didn't want to go back. What did the old guy have to go back to? He was a great guy, but he was always just small time, until the war. He was in his glory."

One more "soldier in grease paint" had died.

So once again she was back in San Francisco at a year's end. This time, however, there would be no problem about getting back to work. When she called Abe Having he was enthusiastic about getting another small unit organized as soon as possible after the holidays.

"Get me a bass man and a drummer this time," she said. "And another magician."

"We'd thought about a master of ceremonies type," Having said. "A funny man."

"Not a chance, guy," she said.

He chuckled. "Once you asked me if Bob B. Downs ran U.S.O. Camp Shows. You running it now?"

"Want to get a few calls and letters from a few admirals and generals and colonels and stuff?" Vivia asked.

"A magician," he said. "A bass player and a drummer."

"Reet."

Well, it was good to rest. She was a little thin and a tiny bit yellow from having to take all the atabrine to ward off malaria. But her mother set in to put flesh on her bones and she slept for a week, not doing much of anything. Liz was not going to be home that Christmas, judging from her letters, all datelined "somewhere in the Pacific."

She felt even more the stranger in San Francisco. Although a few people heard she was in town she didn't accept any calls and didn't return any, except one from the NBC radio station where she was interviewed for a network audience on a direct feed.

Soon she was ready to go back. She kept in touch with Art, by telephone. Having called to say he'd lined up the magician, the bass, the drums. They'd all meet in Los Angeles in early January. She came out of her self-imposed existence as a hermit in her family's house to do her Christmas shopping, just presents for her mother and father and a little something to send to Liz, even if it would not arrive until long past the holidays. The shopping was finished quickly, she had lunch, took a bus toward home, decided to walk the last few blocks. There was the old high school, shut down for the holidays. That place seemed so far in the past. And down the street was the soda shop. She developed the most urgent craving for a strawberry soda. Conditioned memories, she guessed. She wasn't even sure the place would be open, what with school being closed for the holidays. No one went there but high school kids.

But it was, and as she opened the outside door she heard a record begin on the juke box, a big, brassy, full, wild sound, and yet so smooth. It was a band she'd heard only a couple of times, and the record, she had been told, was a big hit back in 1943. She'd been busy and nowhere near a juke box and she'd never heard enough of it, so she took a booth at the back near the juke, put her packages on the seat beside her, and dug it. "Boo-boo-be-doo, boo-boo-be-doo-doo." All instrumental and swingy and somehow so very fresh that it just took over and set her feet to tapping. It ended with a crash. There were only a couple of kids in the place, probably out of nickels. She rose, fished in her purse, came up with some change and examined the list. A lot of the oldies still there, Miller, Dorsey's "Sunny Side of the Street," Betty Hutton's "Dr. Lawyer Indian Chief." Note to Vivian: Work up an arrangement of that one with Art. Good, happy, bouncy little number that would show off her dancing on the break. Ah, there it was. Kenton. But was it "Eager Beaver" or "Artistry in Rhythm"? She played both, punching "Eager Beaver" first. The section work was crisp, heavy on brass, very tight. She loved it, swayed

back to her booth trying to analyze what made the Kenton music so different. The teenager working the counter delivered her strawberry soda. He'd been generous with the ice cream. She dribbled a bit of the froth down her chin. Out there in the islands ice cream was very, very big. Given a choice between ice cream and cold beer a lot of men would pick ice cream, and when a supply ship came in supply people and messhall people battled over the available ice cream. Never enough of it. She felt almost guilty enjoying the soda, thinking of all the men out there in steamy, lonely islands and she felt a restlessness, knew she'd be on pins and needles until it was time to go back, wondered if the bass man were any good, had an idea for a bass intro to "The Very Thought of You." But she'd think about that later. Now it was Kenton, new, a bit wilder than the old bands. While a lot of the good musicians were away at war this piano player, who attacked the keyboard with axlike fingers, had come up with a band to rival the best.

She heard the two records through, left her half-finished soda to put more nickels in the juke box, played the Kenton sides again. She sat again, beginning to understand the interlocking arrangements.

"I think we have something in common." California. Male. Nice voice. She looked up.

Something happened in the area of her diaphragm, a delicious little sinking. His uniform was tailored to fit, Air Corps winterwear, neatly pressed, sleeves showing the two staff sergeant rocker stripes. He was tall, about six feet, slimly sturdy, close-cropped dark hair, eyes smiling. She felt a smile forming, could not take her eyes off his face.

"Stan the Man," he said. "I've driven off all the high school kids, playing him so much."

Still she could not speak.

"Mind if I join you?" He sat down across from her, her eyes following his. She felt very warm, as if summer had suddenly invaded the soda shop. "You don't remember me," he said. She shook her head. She could not have seen him before, never in her life, for if she had she would have remembered.

"Clayton Swan."

It didn't register. She didn't seem to be able to take her eyes off his face, the smile creases at the corners of his eyes, the way his lips seemed to smile even in repose. He

was tanned, his brown eyes were so alive, the whites so clear, so healthy.

"I didn't see you," she said at last.

He grinned. "My hiding place." He pointed to a booth on the far side of the juke box. It was partially blocked by an ice cream counter.

"Hiding from what?"

"Who knows?"

A record finished. "Artistry in Rhythm" came in with Kenton's piano. "Like it?" he asked.

"Very much."

"I've got everything he's done at home. Had Gloria pick them up for me while I was away."

Gloria. Clayton. Square name. My God. "You're *Clayton Swan*," she said, as if a great wonder had been revealed to her. Her voice sounded so young, so surprised. He raised an eyebrow.

"Guilty," he said.

"But she didn't tell me—" She paused, confused. She laughed, the sound causing the two teenagers in the front of the soda shop to look around.

He smiled. "She didn't tell you?"

"Nothing."

"He has a way with brass," he said.

"Never heard trombones used so well," she agreed.

There was a silence as the record played to its finish. She kept time with a straw, tapping it soundlessly against the glass, the half-finished soda forgotten. He seemed to be looking past the surface of her eyes, deep inside, and yet he did not stare and the silence was not strained.

"Home for long?" he asked in the silence, as the juke box ran out of nickels.

"Not long. You?"

He shrugged. "Couple of days more."

She felt a sudden sadness, felt as if she'd been dazed by something she could not understand.

"I saw Gloria May last time I was home," she said.

"She told me. Sorry you couldn't make it to the party."

"I didn't know—" Her mouth was saying things she had no intention of saying. She controlled herself with an effort. "You seem to get a lot of furloughs."

"Just lucky, I guess."

"More than that."

He shrugged. "This one is medical."

"Ohhh."

"Not bad. A wound of honor in a dishonorable place."

She giggled. Jesus H. God. She hadn't giggled since she was sixteen. "Are you trying to tell me you got shot in the—"

"Tail gunner got it right there." He grinned.

"Don't do that any more."

"What?"

"Get shot."

"Nice to know someone cares."

"Where were you?" she asked.

"Tinian."

"And that's where you'll be going?"

"Unless the Marines have taken some closer island, I guess."

She was trying to visualize a map of the Pacific. A couple of days more, he'd said. She'd been with him, had known him, for perhaps fifteen minutes and already she was planning how she could get the troupe to Tinian.

"You're going back, aren't you?" he asked. She nodded. She found herself smiling, smiling, smiling, could not stop smiling, that blaze full blast and natural and unaffected, eyes finding his now and then. Words were not the only communication. His hand held a cigarette, lay at ease on the table and she wanted, more than anything, to reach out and touch. "Wouldn't it be fun if we ran into each other out there?"

"Damn that Goria May," she said suddenly.

"What?"

"Nothing," she said, but she was thinking it. All those years the damned girl had been trying to get her to date her brother, the brother with the square name. Clayton. "What do your friends call you?"

"Clay."

"Clay."

"No one's ever said it like that before," he said, his eyes very, very serious.

"Do you like hot dogs?"

"And I dip cookies in my coffee."

"Ugh, I hate coffee."

He rose without a word and she followed, not questioning it when he paid for her soda after reclaiming his cap from the rear booth. Outside the world had been renewed.

A winter sky was so cleanly blue, so crisply chill that it took her breath, and the city seemed to have had a fresh bath, so clean, so neat, so wonderfully colorful that it welled up in her and made her want to yell out a sound of sheer joy.

She did not note the direction, just walked by his side, her long stride matching his, her head to his shoulder, face turned up, smiling, smiling, smiling for no reason. The talk was of movies and they both thought Bogie was great and how maybe he'd even given his name to the enemy planes. "Bogie twelve o'clock high." Books. He thought Scarlett was a spoiled brat.

"No, no," she said. "She was just a slow learner, that's all. Brave. She was incredibly brave. And she's going to get Rhett back, you'll see."

"You're a romantic."

Strange, she'd never considered herself so.

They walked aimlessly, found themselves near the bay, talking the "do you like" talk, exchanging quite insignificant bits of information that seemed to have so much meaning. He loved Shaw, T.D., Jo Stafford. His favorite song was "There'll Never Be Another You," but he had a thing for Artie's "Begin the Beguine."

"I've never told anyone this," he said as they walked toward the wharfs, ignoring passing people, not even having touched. "I don't know whether I dreamed it or what, but if I'm riding in a car and the radio is on and they start playing 'Begin the Beguine' I change stations or turn it off."

"Why, silly?"

"Just a feeling," he said. "I don't want to say it. It's like if you don't tell a wish it will come true. But if I tell this, it might come true."

"It's all right to tell me."

"Yes, I think so. I have this feeling that, well, not a feeling, maybe a sort of vision. A wrecked car. Me. And the radio still playing."

" 'Begin the Beguine.' "

"Silly, isn't it?"

"We'll always turn it off."

She looked out over the bay, saw the bridges, the bay bridge, the Golden Gate, and beyond, in that crisp, clear air, the Pacific. She shuddered.

Fishing boats were offloading. There was a ripe smell

of old and fresh fish. He picked up a broken piece of brick, sailed it into the water.

"Clayton?"

"Ummm."

"Nothing. Just wanted to try it out."

"Pretty ghastly name."

"I like it." She was smiling, smiling. "I didn't. I do now."

He took her hand in a movement so natural that when hers met his she was totally unprepared for the electric shock, the blast of awareness. The points of contact, palm to palm, came alive. His fingers were individual and surprisingly sensuous entities and she felt a weakness in her knees, accepted it, not even questioning it as they walked away, up the slope, walking aimlessly, talking, smiling, smiling, hands laced, owning the entire city and having it all to themselves. For Vivia, a welling up of all the love songs.

"I remember you, you're the one who made my dreams come true."

"Do you hear it?"

"Yes," he said.

"You don't know what I mean."

"If you hear it, I hear it."

"A waltz. Do you hear it?"

She didn't like waltzes. Wayne King, blah. But there it was, a waltz, riding wings of muted trumpets. Sounds had color. Muted trumpets were quicksilver, the saxes soft gold, and she whirled away, moving ahead of him, waltzing, skirt flaring to show her lovely dancer's legs.

"I *do* hear a waltz," she sang, as he, laughing, ran to catch her, put his arm around her to enfold her in more wonder, waltzed down the wide sidewalk with her providing the music. An old man smiling, moving out of the way, turning to watch them waltz down the sidewalk, a tall young man in uniform, a girl who looked so very young in short coat and swirling skirt. The waltz built and grew, a jazzy, lovely, full-throated song from Vivia, who was oblivious to all but the music and the welling up inside of her of something she'd never known.

There was not even any sadness when, on the third day after she'd met and fallen in love almost instantly with Clayton Swan, she kissed him good-bye in the entry of her house. He didn't want her to go to the airfield with

him, wanted to see her for the last time there in her natural setting, in the home where they'd spent the better part of three days and nights talking, talking, smiling, holding hands and yawning just like the people in the song who were too much in love to say good night, Vivian's father taking to the boy, her mother doting on him, trying to fatten him up with the best of her cooking. Music on the radio turned down low and long, long kisses that were unlike any kisses she had ever experienced, wishing, weeping inside, wishing that she'd listened to Gloria May and dated the older brother with the square name, weeping inside for all the wasted years. Even on her last trip home! She might have been loving him for a whole year. But not even that was a real sadness, only a regret, for there was a lifetime ahead for them.

On the second day, alone in the house, she'd called Abe Having, with Clay sitting beside her, holding her hand.

"Abe, I have a favor to ask. I want you to tell the brass that Tinian is a must for this tour coming up." Smiling at Clay, reaching over to kiss him, lightly, clingingly, sweetly. "Yes, yes, I know, but a word from you will help. I'll work on it from my end too. I'm going to Tinian, Abe. Tell them that. I'm going if I have to swim."

Clinging to him on that last day. "Let me come. I can be with you for another hour or so."

"I'd rather you didn't. Just humor me, baby."

"Why?"

"Well, if I say good-bye to you here, it's just as if I'm kissing you good night and you'll be here waiting for me tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow," she said.

"You know how it is about writing," he said. "I'll write as often as I can."

"Every day," she said. "You'd better write every day."

"I'll try."

"Clay?"

"Umm."

"Be careful, damn you."

The tour got underway, the bass man and the drummer both good men, the bass directly from Guy Lombardo's orchestra but, surprisingly, a good jazz man. It was a new Vivian who found it easy to reject invitations, to scorn the officers' clubs. She spent her spare time with the men, al-

ways ready to entertain at some small club, seeing a touch of Clay in what she had once considered the lowly enlisted men.

The USO and the navy did their best, but often weeks went by without mail and when it came there would be a lovely stack of V-Mail letters in Clay's neat, masculine hand, and the girl who hated writing spent an hour each evening, or some time during each day, with paper and pen. And instead of forgetting how it felt to be held in his arms, the weeks seemed to make the memory more vivid. In her bed, sleep coming, she could see his face with the eloquently expressive brown eyes, the laugh crinkles around them, his lips opening to take hers.

Where once she had almost ignored the war news, letting the war take care of itself, she now read and listened avidly. A dispatch from Mark Fillmore made her understand the reason for the terrible fight at Iwo Jima, and she was grateful to the Marines, for Iwo was to be taken in order to give the B-29's from Tinian and Saipan an emergency landing field on the way back from bombing the Jap home islands. It was terrible to think that so many were dying, but she was selfishly glad, for that emergency field on Iwo Jima might just save her Clayton's life.

Part Three

ONE

THE crew of the *Solicitude* spent the Christmas of 1944 at Pearl Harbor. There had been several medical crew changes. Marcie was long gone, and many of Liz's other colleagues had been transferred. Of the original crew, there were only Liz, Nick Carew—now Chief Medical Officer aboard—and E.O. Gardner. There was a Christmas party aboard, and E.O. acted as Santa Claus. For once, gifts from home had arrived in time. Homefront families had sweetened their coffee with saccharin in order to use their sugar ration to make fudge, cookies, caramels to be sent all over the globe. Vivia had sent Liz perfume and beauty aids, things not always available to a nurse on a hospital ship. Ships in the anchorage hoisted Christmas trees to the highest point, played carols on communications systems. Liz tried unsuccessfully to get a telephone line to speak with her parents, gave up feeling a bit moody. She had not had a letter from Mark for weeks, but suspected he was still out in the Philippines. She'd been tempted to contact Cicily Smith, but decided against it.

She told herself it was a time to be gay, to join in the high-spirited dancing to E.O.'s record player, but she just couldn't. E.O. read her mood, tried to dispel it with a liberal helping of his famous Purple Jesus, medical alcohol mixed with grape juice. She danced with E.O., and with Nick, who seemed as glum as she. No real reason for either of them to feel down, but they did, and she retired early, shortly after the presents had been handed out by E.O. Santa. She slept late, making breakfast of the splendid ship's Christmas dinner. The ship was quiet, many personnel ashore. She listened to carols on the radio, heard the war news. The crisis in Europe was ended, the 101st Airborne, whose general had said "Nuts" to a German demand for surrender, had been relieved by Patton's Third Army. The Ardennes Salient was being slowly flattened, the Battle of the Bulge almost over.

She dozed through the announcement, but E.O.

Gardner heard it. Liz was awakened by one of her nurses, late in the evening, her cabin dark, the porthole blackened, lights out, carols still playing on the radio.

"What is it?" she asked sleepily.

"You'd better come quickly," the nurse said. "They wanted to call the S.P.'s or something, but I said you could handle him."

"Who?" she asked, sitting up, trying to brush wrinkles from her skirt, pushing her short hair into a semblance of order.

"Corpsman Gardner."

She leaped to her feet.

He was in the lounge. A nurse stood in the doorway, looking uneasy. Liz heard a crash. Pushing the nurse aside, she ran into the lounge. He sat in the middle of the floor, broken records around him. He held a canteen cup in one hand, was drinking from it, purple liquid spilling to stain his whites. The room was a mess.

"E.O. . . . what on earth?" she asked, going to him, kneeling.

He'd been weeping. His eyes were red. And he was very definitely drunk.

"E.O., I think you've had enough," she said, reaching for the canteen cup.

He pulled it away. Tears formed in his reddened eyes. "Goddamn, Liz," he said. "Oh, godamn."

"Give it to me," she said.

He threw the cup with drunken force, falling onto his side with the effort. The cup rattled from a metal bulkhead, spilling. "Come on, E.O.," she said, wondering. She'd been with E.O. for almost two years, and he'd always been a model of stability.

"It's not fair, Liz," he said. "It's just not fair."

"What? What's not fair?"

"Not him," he said. "Oh, God, not him." And he was sobbing like a little boy, picking up a record from a disordered stack near him, flinging it to shatter against a wall.

"E.O., you'll be sorry, breaking all the records," she said.

"It doesn't matter," he sobbed. "Nothing matters anymore."

"E.O., has something bad happened?"

He looked at her, controlled his sobs. "Liz, we're going to lose the war," he slurred.

"Ah, come on."

"No," he said, nodding wisely. "We're going to lose the war. He's dead."

"Who?" she asked. "A friend?"

He looked at her, his head bobbing. "You haven't heard?"

"No. Tell me."

Before he could answer there was a commotion and Nick Carew pushed his way past the nurses gathered in the doorway.

"What in the hell is going on?" Carew demanded. "E.O., what's the matter with you?"

"He thinks we're going to lose the war," Liz said, giving Nick a meaningful look.

"He's drunk," Carew said. "Get some coffee into him. Get this place cleaned up."

"I'll take care of him," Liz said.

"He's dead," E.O. repeated. "It's all over."

"What's he talking about?" Nick asked.

"I'm trying to find out," Liz said testily. "E.O., tell me. Who's dead?"

E.O. looked up at the doctor. "We're going to lose the war, sir."

"Not likely," Nick said. "I want you to straighten up, Corpsman."

"He's dead," E.O. said.

"Who's dead?" Liz repeated.

"You haven't heard?"

"No," she said. She put her hands on his arms. "Tell me."

"Heard it on the radio," E.O. said. "You didn't hear it?"

"No."

"God, he was just forty-four. You know?"

"Who?" Liz asked, motioning toward one of the nurses, making a drinking motion to indicate that she wanted coffee.

"He has two kids," E.O. said. "He didn't have to go, you know. Enlisted."

"A lot of people did," Liz said. "Who are you talking about? A good friend?"

"You haven't heard?" E.O. asked drunkenly, beginning to weep again, picking up a record and slinging it, nar-

rowly missing a nurse, the disk sailing out the door to shatter against the corridor wall.

"All right," Carew said. "That's enough. Call a couple of corpsmen and get him into his bed."

"Just a minute," Liz said. "Now, E.O., I want you to tell me why you're unhappy. What's wrong? Who is dead?"

"You haven't heard?" he asked unbelievably.

"No," she said firmly, "I haven't heard and I want you to tell me. Now."

"It's Glenn," he said, reaching for a record. She caught his hand.

"Glenn who?"

"Goddamn, Liz. Glenn Miller."

"For God's sake," Nick said. Liz gave him a stern, warning look.

"That's terrible," she said.

"His plane went down over the channel," E.O. said. He wailed for a moment. "On Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve, Liz, while we were partying and having fun."

"E.O.," Liz said, taking a cup of coffee from a nurse. "Drink this."

He shook his head.

"Maybe he'll be found."

He shook his head more violently. "No. He's dead. I know it. I can feel the emptiness in myself. "And without him we'll just plain lose the war. Without Glenn's music—"

"Oh, shit," Nick Carew said, turning to stomp out of the lounge. A nurse laughed. E.O. looked up unbelievably. He started to weep and Liz leaned over, put his head on her shoulder, patted his hair.

"It's okay," she whispered. "I understand. It's okay." And for a long, long time she sat there on the cold floor, his head on her shoulder, feeling his body jerking with sobs, feeling the wetness of his tears. She could see him at Tarawa on his hands and knees with the towels wet and dripping with blood, the bucket half full, saying, "I can't get it cleaned up, I can't get it all up." And it was not, she felt, at all shameful for him to be weeping, for he was weeping for more than a dead bandleader, perhaps for much more, for all of those whom he'd watched die, for a changed world, changed forever, for the wounded who were so brave and for those yet to die and suffer and she

felt her own tears begin, let them fall, for herself, for the dead, for Mark—*oh, Mark*. Gradually the nurses went away, leaving a mature woman in a blue uniform with a full lieutenant's insignia holding a corpsman in whites, a young boy drunk and weeping, and her tears wet his head as she cuddled him.

"I know," she kept whispering. "I do know."

He requested transfer the next day. She tried to talk him out of it.

He was bleary-eyed, suffering a champion hangover.

"I have to, Liz," he said. "I've got to do something."

"E.O., you're very valuable to me. I don't know how I'll get along without you."

"Well, I just have to."

"You're doing an important job. You went to the reef at Tarawa. You were on Attu. You've done your part, E.O., and your place is here. I need you."

"It's just not enough," he said. "I've got to do more."

And he would not listen, insisted on her forwarding his request to be transferred to a combat unit. He seemed fine when his orders came through, quickly, combat corpsmen being in demand.

"Guess you think I'm crazy," he said.

"No, not at all."

"Well, I'm going west."

"E.O., keep your head down."

"You bet." He grinned. "Look, Liz, don't worry. They had their chance at me at Tarawa." He pulled out the distorted bullet, his good luck piece. "This was the one with my name on it. The only one. So I'll be all right."

The ship seemed strangely empty as it steamed away from Hawaii. She tried to kill time by writing letters, by working with the new nurses, the new corpsmen. Once she went into the lounge, carrying the records E.O. had left in her care, the very special records by Major Glenn Miller's Air Corps Band. But the music was so beautifully lonely that she soon turned the machine off and carried the records back to her quarters.

Now familiar and disturbing things were happening, the ship joining a huge task force and steaming westward then northwestward.

The island was black, low except where the extinct volcano towered toward the sky. She watched the bombard-

ment and knew that men were dying there on that ugly, black, volcanic island, knew that more would die when the milling, wheeling landing craft began to arrow in toward the beaches.

TWO

FOR months, anyone looking at a map of the Pacific knew that the Marines would have to, eventually, deal with Iwo Jima. A line drawn directly from the Marianas to Tokyo, from the B-29 bases being hurriedly constructed to the heart of the Jap home empire, went directly through the small group of Volcano Islands. Iwo was the only one of those islands large enough to hold an airfield that could handle the monster bombers.

Even in wartime, when a nation's reserves are being spent decades in advance, economics are considered. A B-29 bomber cost half a million dollars. Each monster carried eleven men. It had cost thousands of dollars to train those eleven men. The loss of a B-17 was only a minor blow compared to the loss of one of those gleaming Super-forts. So huge, so proud, they disdained warpaint and flew missions in gleaming silver, their fearsome, power-turreted armaments striking terror into the hearts of the Japanese airmen who faced them.

A wounded monster saved by an emergency airfield on Iwo Jima would live to fly again. And the range of the deadly P-51 Mustangs was a factor too. Iwo was needed to give the 51's a base from which to provide fighter cover for the planned massive raids on the Jap home islands.

Mark Fillmore was not privy to the early planning, for he was with MacArthur's army in the Philippines, but it was evident to him that there were two choices for the forward movement of the northern prong of the two-pronged offensive. The planners could choose to veer slightly southward, along the Formosa-China axis, using western China as the jumping-off point for the final assault on the empire. Or they could take the more direct route, through the Volcano Islands, island hopping northward through the Bonins and up the tail of small islands arrowing directly toward Tokyo.

Cicily Smith knew early on that Iwo was on the planning boards. When the 5th Marine Division began loading aboard the transport *Athene* on Christmas Day, E.O. Gardner was still aboard the *Solicitude*, getting drunk. The 4th Division was moving down the hills from their pleasant camp fifteen hundred feet up the side of an extinct volcano. The 3rd was on Guam, nursing wounds, rebuilding with fresh meat from U.S. training camps. The men of the 3rd, like the men of the 4th and 5th divisions, had no idea where they'd be going next, only that it would be westward, toward Japan. Most of them had never heard of Iwo Jima.

But the Japs knew. As early as May of 1944 it became evident to Japanese military planners that the Americans would have to try to take Iwo. General Hideki Tojo made his personal choice for a man to direct the Iwo Jima defenses. His choice was to be a fateful one for thousands of young Americans. He chose a man of independent mind, a general named Kuribayashi. Kuribayashi had spent three years in China and Manchuria. He had watched the war fortunes of the empire rise to a peak and then begin to wane. Most importantly, he had learned the lesson illustrated at Tarawa and repeated at Saipan, Peleliu, and Guam. On a much larger scale, the same lesson had been taught in Normandy.

General Kuribayashi was convinced that the cornerstone of Japanese defensive policy was 180 degrees off. For years the military had planned to stop any invasion on the beaches and they'd wasted thousands of Japanese lives demonstrating that it could not be done. Kuribayashi arrived on Iwo Jima in mid-June, and he set about organizing a purely defensive fight on Iwo Jima, often against opposition from the Japanese Imperial Navy. His radical plan raised screams all the way to Tokyo. First, there would be only light resistance, small arms and mortars, on the immediate beaches. The enemy would be allowed to land in force, the larger its force the better, for as the invader moved off the beaches he would come into an interlocking field of fire from guns of all sizes, guns mounted at the heights of each end of the island, guns sighted in on individual plots of volcanic sand and rock. Second, and also against all tradition, there would be no *banzai* attacks. Each Japanese soldier would struggle to stay alive as

long as possible. His only goal would be to take ten of the enemy with him when he died.

There was no doubt in Kuribayashi's mind that Iwo was the next island in U.S. plans. There was no doubt in his mind that he would die on that sulphur island. Even before he arrived there was confirmation that the enemy was looking at Iwo Jima, for on June 15 seven U.S. carriers launched fighters during storm squalls and destroyed seventeen Japanese planes on the ground and in the air.

From ocean level, in profile, Iwo Jima looked like a comical whale, half-submerged, with a bulbous head topped by a rounded eyecase, a waist tapering low, a huge tail fin rising to the hollowed cone of an extinct volcano. From the air, and on Marine planning maps, the island looked like a pork chop, tailing down to the 550-foot height of Mount Suribachi on the southern tip. Suribachi would be the first land seen. All rock, barren, shades of grisly black and brown, it dominated the island and was often wreathed in sulphur fumes from the living fires deep within.

From Suribachi, the island extended five miles to the north, across a narrow waist of volcanic sand. It was over those less than eight square miles, where sulphur springs bubbled hotly to the surface, the northern end a plateau at a three-hundred-foot elevation, occasional hills in the center rising to over that height, that General Kuribayashi scattered his arms. His fortifications were walled five inches thick with concrete and roofed six and a half inches thick with reinforcing rods cast in. Machine-gun posts were protected by twelve to twenty inches of reinforced concrete. He made moles of his men, digging into the soft rock of Mount Suribachi to form a seven-story network of caves protected by a minimum of thirty-five feet of rock. These were entered at right angles to prevent blast damage. He walled his caves with logs and lumber reclaimed from the dismantling of the island's only village. On the north of the island Kuribayashi constructed his headquarters seventy-five feet inside the earth. A network of tunnels, it would survive the direct hit of a sixteen-inch shell or an aerial bomb. On Osaka Yama, which the Marines would call Hill 362A, he had built four systems of tunnels. And even as the U.S. Navy and Air Corps rained high explosives on the island at irregular intervals, even as the Japanese Navy and Air Force were

being destroyed piecemeal, Kuribayashi built and tunneled and mounted his guns high on Suribachi and in the northern heights and preached his policy to his men.

"We do not try to hold the beaches," he said. "There we will place only infantry with automatic weapons. We will dig in our main forces on Suribachi, and in the north. We will allow the enemy to swarm onto the island, to be caught in the open on the isthmus, where we will destroy him with our mortars, our artillery, our rockets. If the enemy is able to advance, we will retreat slowly, and as we retreat, we will kill. For each of our own dead, ten enemy dead."

Kuribayashi's plan would come as a total surprise to Marine brass. Everyone, including Howlin' Mad Smith, overall commander, expected the Japs to follow the old pattern, to fight on the beaches and then make it easy for the Marines with one last desperate, hopeless *banzai* charge. Had Intelligence known even the name of the Japanese commander, had anyone looked into his background, Iwo Jima might have been a different story. Kuribayashi had had ample opportunity to know the Americans. He had studied American tactics at Fort Bliss. He had been a military attaché in Canada, and he was on record as having said: "The United States is the last country in the world that Japan should fight. Its industrial potentiality is huge and fabulous, and the people are energetic and versatile."

And so, throughout the summer of '44, energetic and versatile Americans prepared for a meeting, without introductions, between the twenty thousand Japanese under General Kuribayashi and the thirty thousand Marines who, in the best traditions of Robert E. Lee, would storm the high ground and assault the fortified positions. Iwo Jima would be the most heavily fortified position in modern warfare.

The Marine plan was solid Marine tradition: Put as many men on shore as fast as possible and then move out.

The main landing vehicles at Iwo were to be the LVT, a tracked and armored landing boat, and amphibious trucks, Dukw's, called Ducks. To put the landing vehicles in place off the black sand shores of Iwo, eight hundred ships began loading as early as November, ships laden with gasoline and carbon paper, cigarettes—100 million Luckies, Chesterfields, and Camels for the 5th

Division alone—holy water and whole blood, socks and welding supplies, shoe laces and mortar shells, bulldozers and grave markers.

Two hospital ships would be offshore, Liz Wilder's *Solicitude* and the old *Solace*, the ship that had survived Pearl Harbor unscratched. There would be an auxiliary hospital ship and four LST's rigged to handle wounded at beachside. Thousands of hospital beds were being prepared on Saipan and Guam.

Throughout that summer and fall, reconnaissance photos showed that Iwo grew stronger each day, the island's defenders going underground, taking their guns with them, pillboxes and blockhouses growing by multiples, the boat basins busy with ships and boats bringing in men and supplies in spite of the continuous American hammering from the sea and the air. Iwo Jima was, in effect, a stone fortress surrounded by a seven-hundred-mile moat that, on occasion, could provide waves of up to a hundred feet. In short, Iwo was going to be one bloody bitch.

E.O. Gardner got his orders four days after Christmas, joined men of the 5th Division aboard transport where the old slogan, hurry up and wait, was once again demonstrated. Crowded, hot, sweaty, no record player, they waited and waited, and when the ships finally began to move out, the last liberty in Honolulu now only a drunken memory, it was almost a relief from the endless waiting.

E.O. had some doubts. He could be back on the *Solicitude*. What Liz had said made sense, when you thought about it. He was a hospital ship corpsman. He knew his job. He had done valuable work. And yet there was a feeling of fulfillment too in being with Marines who cursed happily and bitched about conditions and questioned the mentality of the brass, who gambled, drank booze sneaked aboard, honed bayonets and knives, talked about previous fights. The 5th Division itself was unblooded, but a good percentage of its men were survivors, some having seen action as far back as Guadalcanal. They kidded E.O. about being a runty pill-pusher and laughed at his attempts to learn poker, but it was good-natured kidding. Not too far in the future he might be in a position to be their Gunga Din. When a man had a bullet through his spleen and was chawin' up the ground and kickin' all around and yelled "Corpsman," well. . . .

To his eternal shame, E.O. got seasick. It wasn't just

the motion, he guessed. It was the crowding, the smell, the closeness. Aboard the *Solicitude* he had shared quarters with other corpsmen, but they'd been clean and neat and the blowers kept fresh air moving. Being seasick was how he met Tony Stein. E.O. was on deck, leaning over the rail, calling the Irishman, as the saying went, "O—rourrk," his stomach long since empty. In a moment of respite he straightened, wiped his teary eyes, sat down weakly on the hot deck and saw a Marine looking at him.

"First trip out, kid?"

E.O. shook his head weakly.

"It'll pass."

"Yeah, like terminal cancer," E.O. said.

"Here," the Marine said, extending a pack of crackers.

"God," E.O. gasped.

"Eat one, damnit."

He ate. It stayed down.

Tony Stein was twenty-four. He looked older, perhaps because he'd been on that Fucking Island, Guadalcanal, and on Bougainville and Vella Lavella. E.O. saw him again soon after, and again on deck. You got on deck anytime they let you, even if the sun was hot enough to char your hide, because it was infinitely better than being crowded in the lower levels with the smell of ten-day socks and cigars. Tony Stein was oiling and polishing a strange-looking weapon.

"Hey, I didn't thank you for saving my life," E.O. said.

Stein shrugged. "Call it an investment. When we hit the beach, stay close, kid." His hair was, of course, G.I. He had a squarish, rather handsome face, strong mouth, straight nose, smooth cheeks down which cruised drops of sweat.

"What the hell is that?" E.O. asked, indicating the weapon.

"That, my boy, is a stinger, the Tony Stein special."

"It ain't issue."

"Bet your sweet ass. Came out of an F-4-F."

"Jesus."

"Yeah. I was a toolmaker, see? Took it here, cut it off, added this."

"Heavy?"

"Try it."

E.O. took the stinger. It was heavy. It was a deadly

weight, a wing gun fashioned into a hand-held machine gun.

"No objections from the brass?" E.O. asked.

"Shit."

He was only a corporal. Three campaigns behind him and only a corporal, and as E.O. got to know him he began to realize why. Tough Tony was a man of independent mind. He had his own ideas about how to fight a war from the individual standpoint and sometimes that got him into trouble. And he was a loner. He didn't join the card or crap games, kept his distance. There'd be times when, sitting on the deck, they'd just sit and look out over the ocean and watch the bobbings of the other ships in the convoy and not say a word. And then—he'd taken a liking to E.O.—Tony would say something like, "Hope all them four-F bastards ain't made all the good money by the time this thing is over."

He was an Ohio boy. He spoke Yugoslavian, from his mother. Aside from killing Japs, all he wanted to do was get the war over and go home.

Early on in their friendship he persisted in thinking, because of E.O.'s seasickness, that E.O. was a raw recruit. One day E.O. told him, "I was on the reef at Tarawa, Tony. Cut that shit about me being green."

Tony looked at him, eyebrows raised, and whistled. Then, little by little, as men will, not saying too much at one time lest it be considered bullshit or bragging, the two compared notes. When a man cut himself severely in a fall onto a razor-honed knife, E.O. leaped in to stop the flow from a severed artery. Tony, nearby, whistled again.

"Kid," he said, "now I know I want you close to me when we hit the beach."

"You won't need me," E.O. said.

"In case I do, you be there, okay?"

"Okay," E.O. said.

It seemed as if they would be on board ship forever, as the great armada grew, as the battlewagons joined up and the great carriers with their packs of ever-worried destroyers rode low on the horizon, sending up their planes for cover. There was time to get to know a lot of men. It was a new experience for E.O. He no longer doubted his decision. He was just plain proud to be where he was, to be a part of it, to get down to the basic shit of war, to know that he'd be going in with the assault troops

and that there would be Japs waiting. There were times when he wished he was a Marine, but there was his size to prevent that. And he'd been trained to do a damned important job. Tony and the others would do their jobs and he'd do his, and it was all a part of the whole.

He had his duties aboard. In the main, they consisted of handing out seasick pills, APC's, laxatives, and salve for the toe itch that was suffered by almost every man who had previously landed on a balmy tropical island. About the only thing that really worked was the laxative. He took the usual comments about how the sawbones thought APC would cure everything from jock itch to the clap. He was a naturally cheerful fellow and he became known all over the ship. No one gave him much static. When a man needed a corpsman, he needed him badly. And a buddy of Tough Tony Stein's was no man to fool around with. Tony was one of those Americans referred to by Old Blood and Guts when he'd said that Americans traditionally loved a fight. And Tony was a Marine, a paramarine at that, sporting the jump wings on his uniform. Tony Stein had a certain reputation. Tony fought for the pure hell of it, for the fun of it. And usually he was the only participant who had fun.

There were those aboard who fought for other reasons, and one of them gave E.O. a queer sick feeling when he was called to take a look at a PFC with a stomachache. PFC Frank Sousley was lying on his bunk, stripped to skivvies, sweating and trying to ignore the harmonica playing of a stockily built, dark private who sat on a nearby bunk. E.O. dosed Sousley with APC and told him that if he didn't feel better in a couple of hours he'd have a doc come and take a look.

"Don't waste time on him," the dark man said, taking the harmonica out of his mouth. "He's gonna get it anyhow."

"Goddamnit, Hayes," Sousley said, "that ain't funny."

"You're gonna get it, buddy boy," Hayes said grimly. "And just in case I ain't there at the time, I'll play it for you in advance." He put his harmonica into his mouth with a sardonic grin and played Taps.

"Take your fucking mouth organ and go drive a truck," Sousley said. Nineteen, he was on a troopship for the first time. He suspected that his stomachache came from either sheer fear or Ira Hayes's continual and often gleeful

statement, "You're going to get it. You're going to get it good."

But he'd gone a little too far when he'd said, "Go drive a truck." There was, for Hayes, no mistaking the meaning. Niggers drove trucks. Hayes put his harmonica in his pocket. "Just how sick are you?" he asked, moving toward Sousley's bunk. Hayes was Indian, full-blood Pima, dark. All his life he'd been classed with Negroes and Mexicans and he was one man who fought, not for the fun of it, but because he was sick of that shit.

"Hey, hold it," E.O. said. "What's going on?"

"You too sick to stand up like a man?" Hayes asked.

Sousley tried to get up, but E.O. pressed his hands on Sousley's chest "Knock off the crap," E.O. said. "The man's sick."

"I won't be sick always," Sousley said.

"I'll look forward to your quick recovery," Hayes said, pulling out the harmonica and playing Taps, looking straight at Sousley. No man had a right to tell him to go drive a truck with the niggers. He had fought with the paramarines at Vella Lavella and Bougainville. He was a Marine, not a truck driver. And then Hayes remembered that he still had part of a pint hidden away. He glared at both E.O. and Sousley, put his harmonica away, and went out.

"What's with him?" E.O. asked.

"He's crazy," Sousley said. "He's fucking crazy. If the Japs don't kill the sonofabitch he'd better watch out for me."

"Goddamn," E.O. said. "You guys are going to have enough Japs to fight soon enough."

Twenty thousand of them, in fact, dug into caves, cement blockhouses, tunnels, pillboxes. And the hammering of the fleet on the Iwo Milk Run, the overflight of carrier planes strafing and bombing, the B-24's dropping tons of high explosives were not as worrisome to them as the lack of bathing water, the shortage of good food, the uncertainty about when, exactly, the Marines would invade.

THREE

EIGHT hundred ships strong, the entire expeditionary force comprising over one hundred thousand men, the Amphibious Corps closed on Iwo Jima. The unbleeding 5th, assigned the eastern beaches nearest Suribachi, would cut across the narrow neck of the island, wheel left and attack the high ground. The experienced 4th would move to the center of the neck, wheel right to take the high ground above the eastern side boat landing.

"We don't think they'll be needed," said a staff officer giving the Marines' favorite war correspondent a private briefing aboard Harry Schmidt's flagship, "but the high brass decided to put the 3rd Division on boats and have them standing by, instead of holding them ready on Guam. The 4th and 5th can do the job. Take 'em a couple of weeks, maybe ten days."

Mark had heard it before. It was necessary, that optimism. He'd heard it at Tarawa. If they didn't feel that way, confident, then how in hell could one expect them to make the landing? If every gyrene had known in advance about the bloody lagoon at Tarawa, how many of them would have boarded the landing craft? Foolish question, he answered himself with a wry grin. Almost every damned one of them, each one sure that it would be the man to his left or right who got hit.

"It'll be some show," the staff officer said. "The navy will knock them off the island."

Mark had heard that one before too. They'd even said that at Peleliu, where the pre-invasion bombardment had been the least effective one so far. He didn't say anything, but Mark knew that there'd been one helluva row between the Marines and the navy about the force to be used in the bombardment of Iwo. The Marines lost the argument. It was the same old story of interservice rivalry. Sometimes it was a force for good, achieving extra effort from a man in an effort to prove that his branch was the best. Sometimes the rivalry was just plain stupid.

Sometimes they just didn't learn. Billy Mitchell had

had to fight to prove the worth of air power and the navy brass *still* wasn't convinced, for instead of concentrating all they had on Iwo Jima they were going off on a glory hunt. It was clear to Mark that there was one main reason for it. The Air Corps was simply getting too much glory. The navy had fought from the beginning against development of the expensive weapons system that was the biggest bomber built to date. They'd lost, and now the B-29's were beginning to blast the Jap home islands regularly, getting headlines. The navy needed headlines of its own. "Off the record, Mark," General Schmidt told him, "I asked for ten days of bombardment. The brass said if we hit 'em that hard we'd lose the element of surprise." He snorted. "They've been digging in for a year and we're going to *surprise* them?"

Schmidt, in direct command of landing forces, appealed to Howlin' Mad, overall commander, who got the same response. It was impossible to give the Marines more than three days' worth of naval shelling. More would come into direct conflict with Admiral Spruance's plans to hit Japan with a huge force of carrier planes. The navy would show the world that they could bomb too.

The first large-scale B-29 raids had been less than spectacular. Nervous men missed the targets, and over one hundred Superforts were pushed over Tokyo by a 120-knot tailwind, swooping past at thirty thousand feet at almost 450 miles per hour. The navy's answer was Task Force 58, a swirt, hard-hitting carrier force that would use pinpoint precision bombing, thus making the Air Corps look silly with their half-million-dollar monsters.

There was a last-minute decision to pull two of the newest and deadliest battleships, the *Washington* and the *North Carolina*, out of the assault.

"I attended the Naval War College twenty-five years ago," Howlin' Mad had yelled at Mark. "And the sons-of-bitches haven't learned a goddamned thing in a quarter century."

But, hell, the Marines had proven time and time again that they didn't need the effing navy's guns. What good had the guns done at Tarawa? It was men who got the job done, not the big guns. And as the assault on Iwo neared, and word began to circulate on the navy's private

gossip circuits, even the Marine generals had to admit that Pete Mitscher's Task Force 58 had done a helluva job. On the first day navy pilots obliterated the Nakajima aircraft plant at Ota, a target hit by B-29's only a few days before with slight damage to eleven of thirty-seven buildings. And on the second day the carrier planes hit the Nakajima engine plant at Musashino-Tama, where a recent B-29 raid had succeeded only in burning down a hospital.

The navy was ecstatic. They'd destroyed five hundred Jap planes in the air and on the ground, set an escort carrier on fire, sunk nine ships and a destroyer, and damaged several others. And all at a loss of only forty-nine U.S. planes. Meanwhile, the "old ladies," ships like the 1912-built *Arkansas*, the *Texas*, the *Nevada*, the *Idaho*, and the *Tennessee*, could take care of chipping rock off the gun emplacements on Iwo. The old ladies set about the job at 0707 on the morning of February 16. The only problem was that the smoke quickly hid the targets from sight.

"We're going about this one methodically," a ship's captain told Mark. "We have the island laid out in a grid with every known target numbered. There's a master index of targets on the *Estes*. When we blow one off the map we check it off."

That evening, when the fleet put out to sea for the night, the first of the three days of bombardment granted to the Marines had, as estimated from recon photos, destroyed exactly seventeen of nearly seven hundred pill-boxes, gun emplacements, blockhouses.

That Iwo was important was evidenced by the presence of the Secretary of the Navy himself and by the largest news gathering of the Pacific war. Forrestal quoted General Julian Smith after Tarawa. "I agree with the general," the Secretary said. "I can never again see a United States Marine without experiencing a feeling of reverence."

Howlin' Mad Smith, glaring through his glasses, told the newsmen it was a tough one, that was why the Marines were there. He said he expected the Japs to put every man they had down on the beaches where the Marines would quickly break their backs.

Mark was deliberately staying away from the troops. He admitted to himself that he was scared. The island

was dark, black, forbidding. And it was not merely personal fear. He could not find in himself the moral courage to become involved, once more, with young men who were going to die. This time, at least during the initial stages of assault, he would take advantage of his position as the pet correspondent of the Marines and view the operation from the sea, going where he pleased, a favored man. Not even Ernie Pyle, over from Europe to watch the operation from an aircraft carrier way out on the fringe of the action, had such favored treatment.

Mark was close enough to watch as the *Pensacola*, perhaps lured by the strange silence of the guns mounted high on Suribachi, tempted the Japs beyond endurance, bringing down fire that hit her six times in three minutes, burned her planes in the catapults, set off ammo, sent her running for the sea. She had holes below the waterline, and men dead and dying aboard her.

Behind her came little gunboats moving toward the beach to cover the highly secret teams of UDT men, swimmers who had only their natural skills and basic equipment such as swim fins. These men dived, swam, surfaced to catch a breath as the Japanese, thinking that the gunboats were landing craft, opened fire. They struck every gunboat in the forward line within minutes while the boats' skippers yelled for smoke and the old ladies opened up with fourteen-inchers to blanket the beaches under smoke cover. Then the swimmers, their fins put on over tennis shoes, with only swim trunks as cover, with lead lines for testing water depth, mine detonators, knives, dropped off the side of a speeding boat to discover that there were no underwater obstructions, only deep, swift currents.

When recovery of the swimmers began, at noon, not one of the gunboats was untouched. Some were under tow, one was sinking, but not one retreated until the swimmers were picked up. Only one man was missing. Of twelve gunboats, only four could make for Saipan under their own power. A destroyer had also been hit. Tokyo radio reported: "On February 17 enemy troops assaulted Iwo Jima and were repelled."

The underwater reconnaissance operation gave the *Solicitude* her first wounded, among them a swimmer who made it safely back to a gunboat, mounted the bridge to watch the action, and lost both of his legs to a

shell that swept the bridge clean. And while Liz Wilder assisted Dr. Carew they could hear, even there in the operating suite, the boom and thunder as the bombardment was resumed.

Two days of shelling and air attack and the firepower ashore had been demonstrated quite effectively during the gunboat engagement. Intelligence kept coming up with fresh information that furrowed the brows of Marine brass. For example, in the high ground over the East Boat Basin, it had been estimated that there were four antitank guns. It was discovered that there were at least thirteen guns there, some as large as six-inchers.

Mark was in on the conference between Harry Schmidt's boys and the navy during which it was decided to move the battleships to within a mile and a quarter and to use their big guns deliberately against specific targets. This was slow work. First it was necessary to blast the concealing sand away, then to target in several shells before one blockhouse was gone. Near day's end photos showed that sixteen of twenty blockhouses on the beach had been destroyed, as well as about half of the pillboxes. The message went out: "Landing tomorrow."

"Goddamnit," said a staff officer within Mark's hearing. "They've got ammo left, why don't they use it?"

FOUR

E.O. had been awake since before three. Crouched in the LST, his stomach churning, going acid, he could see the art work on the forward door that would fall with a crash when the vehicle hit the beach. Some fairly talented fellow had drawn a buxom woman, one breast naked and protruding, around a partially opened door. The legend below read: THE GREEN DOOR. He had eaten breakfast with Tony Stein, and more than once had heard the meal referred to as the last supper. Steak. Feed 'em well before you get 'em killed. In another part of the ship Ira Hayes took advantage of the last meal to needle Frank Sousley one more time. "Enjoy it, buddy boy, it's your last. You're going to get it." But he was too busy putting away the chow to play Taps on his harmonica and Frank

Sousley was too scared to care what the bitter Indian had to say.

"Look, you men, this is not just another goddamned island. This one is Jap home territory. You're gonna be the first white men ever to set foot on it. They're gonna do their damndest to kick your asses off it. I don't think we want to let 'em do that, do we?" A company commander was making his last little speech before boarding the landing craft, leading the way down the webbing. E.O.'s legs were like spaghetti.

Mark could see that the two new, deadly looking battleships, the *North Carolina* and the *Washington*, were back from Japan. The noise began at 0640, seven battleships, seven heavy and light cruisers, destroyers blasting away with all guns in an effort to cover every inch of the island with high explosive. The island disappeared in a cloud of dust, bringing to Mark's mind a picture from the primeval past when the two volcanoes had been active, their eruptions obscuring the outlines of the island in smoke and dust. Carrier planes came in low and cheering could be heard when the troops in the landing craft, milling, seeking their proper positions, saw Marine F-4U's scraping their bellies on the beaches. B-24's came in high from the Marianas and their cargo rained down and then the navy was back at work with all guns aimed at the beaches in bellowing unison. From the air, the hugeness of the operation could be appreciated—boats and ships covering a hundred square miles of ocean, and the landing vehicles beginning to make waves in lines toward the beaches while the naval cannon sent their shells whooshing overhead. Nine waves were formed to hit the beach, five minutes apart, placing almost ten thousand men on the sands in less than an hour.

E.O. could feel the vessel turn and then straighten. A sergeant, not on his first landing, yelled, "First mother says 'This is it' I shoot." He couldn't see, but the first waves were landing and there was a strange lack of fire from the Japs. LST's were opening their doors to release armored amphib tanks, 75's ready to blast, while navy shells were being lifted to lance inland. Four waves were to land, to begin the scramble up the steep and unstable sands that moved beneath a man's feet and sometimes swallowed him to the knees.

And then there was a bit of small-arms fire, nothing

really serious. Men hoped. Maybe this was going to be a piece of cake. Maybe the Japs had pulled out. Only small-arms fire and a few mortar shells. Pillboxes exploded with grenades and satchel charges. One unit was already all the way across the neck of the island.

E.O. felt better with his feet on the dark, wet sands. The beach rose above him. Men were crawling, digging, scratching their way up through the coarse volcanic sand. A man fell and, for a moment, E.O. thought he'd merely slipped. Then he saw the ultimate stillness and, with fifty-one pounds of medical supplies and equipment on his back, fought his way to the sloping, sliding sand and felt for a pulse in the throat. There was none. Then the quiet began to fade and the guns of Suribachi crossed fire with the guns of the high north ground and there was a savage roaring in the air, a continuous drumming of explosion through which he heard the distinctive rattle of Tony Stein's stinger. Officers were dying too for the assault on Suribachi. The assault was stuck on the beach, stuck under a series of flattened terraces that climbed slowly and were constantly under fire from the guns, from machine guns in pillboxes, from small arms.

E.O. had his work to do. When he landed he patted the left pocket of his fatigue jacket and felt his good-luck piece, the bullet that had his name on it, the only one. He wasn't worried. A near burst put sand in his eyes and he blinked it out and poured sulfa powder on a shrapnel wound, tied off the bleeding in a shattered arm, yelled instructions to corpsmen who were taking the wounded back to the water's edge.

He heard the orders being passed, felt a compulsion to see, and scrambled up the sands, sand in his clothing, coarse particles cutting his hands. He saw Tony leap to his feet, stinger chattering, firing from the hip, long, weaving strides. A pillbox right in front of him spat .25-caliber death. He sprayed the inside of the pillbox, moved on, and now and then E.O., between treating the wounded, could see him, always moving, attacking pillbox after pillbox with only the stinger. A Company was moving on the back of one man. Tony was aided by two other Marines who, impressed by his drive, attached themselves to him.

After killing twenty or more Japanese in the first hour, he was running back toward E.O., barefoot, no helmet. He slid to a halt, fell beside E.O.

"What the fuck you doing?" E.O. yelled.

"Out of ammo for the stinger," Tony gasped, then he was on his feet, running well without his boots, dodging, weaving.

"Jesus Christ, Tony," E.O. said when Tony returned after the fifth trip to the beach for more ammo. "Take it easy. You're not the only man on the island."

"Shit," Tony said, "these Japs is my meat."

There were more wounded now and E.O. was busy. Once, twice, he felt the snip of a bullet or a piece of shrapnel at his clothing, shrugged it off. He was needed. That's why he was there. When a man called "Corpsman," that meant him. And then he saw Tony running again, weaving, falling, rising, moving in on a pillbox, and then he staggered and the stinger flew out of his hands as he hit the ground. E.O. started crawling forward, saying, "No, no." And Tony was on hands and knees, crawling to retrieve the stinger, moving forward. Even over the firing, E.O. could hear him yelling.

Mark Fillmore was one of a group of men pressed closely around a radio. They heard the battle, heard the calm voices, the tight voices, voices saying, "Six tanks at Airfield One" and "Give me naval fire on target one three four."

The 4th was catching hell. Big cannon and mortars were sighting in on their landing areas, fire coming from the front, from the sides. Fire poured out from over fifty pillboxes, some so battered that life within seemed incredible. Destroyers risked being hit to close in and blast at the mountain and its terrible, belching guns, and the *Tennessee* stood close inshore firing methodically at that damned mountain.

The attack on Suribachi was underway, but it had been long delayed and had moved only 150 yards before the approach of night forced the attackers to draw up and dig in for the expected *banzai*.

No one man could see it all, could understand that this was a new kind of fight. As the afternoon wore on, E.O. moved on leaden legs, came upon a Marine with both legs gone. He was conscious. "Glad to see you, buddy," said the Marine. "Can you give me a little help?"

E.O. rigged a plasma bottle, tied off the stumps of his legs.

"Thanks, Doc," the Marine said. E.O. gave him a ciga-

rette and left him. He had to, there were others. The man, if lucky, would be picked up by other corpsmen coming behind to move wounded to the rear, to the doctors who were now on the beach, to the LST's just offshore, to the hospital ships.

On the *Solicitude*, the first casualties from the gunboats having been treated, the medical crew readied for the flood. It began with the landing only an hour old, boatloads of them hoisted in wire baskets that soon dripped blood, young men with surprised eyes, still not believing it could happen to them, young men on every available surface of the boats. Soon it was realized that two hospital ships, all of the hospital LST's, all of the doctors working on the transports would be busy. For two-thousand men were ripped, burned, torn, broken on D-Day.

"How's it hanging, buddy?" Tony Stein asked, dropping down beside E.O., who was applying plaster to a shattered arm. Darkness had come quickly, but it had brought no end to the Japanese fire.

The man whose arm was shattered, his pain eased by morphine, grinned up at Tony. "Wouldn't sell this arm for a million dollars," he said.

Tony had started digging. It was easy in the sand, too easy, the sides of the foxhole kept caving in, but he was cozy in a few minutes and, for a while, E.O. lay there on the sand. Then he gathered enough energy to dig his own hole.

A man crawled by, passing along the rumor that Jap fire was so heavy that they'd had to close the beaches, that nothing else was coming ashore.

"We don't need nothing else," Tony said sleepily, "except maybe a case of cold beer."

Eyes strained in the darkness to detect the first hint of the wild *banzai*. There came only the incessant heavy fire from guns that had been sighted in on the Marine areas for weeks. E.O.'s uneasy sleep was often interrupted by the call "Corpsman, corpsman." He was sleeping in the early morning when an ammo dump went up with a bellowing roar. Shells continued to explode for a long, long time.

With the first light he could see the dead, the mangled dead. It was worse than Tarawa. Bodies cut in half, blown into pieces, for all through the night the intact Japanese positions had sent down mortar, rocket, and artillery fire

onto the entire area occupied by the Marines. There had been no *banzai*. A man the Marines had never heard of had seen to that. General Kuribayashi's plan was working well. At little cost to his own lives, he had killed Marines throughout the night.

Carrier planes came in with the dawn and napalm dripped and drooled redly down the slopes of Suribachi. A tank was burning and the smell of scorching flesh issued from it. Behind it was a Japanese body run over, making a smudge of blood and guts. Word came that the 3rd Division was to be landed. Instead of welcoming the news, men shuddered. They knew things were bad, but to call in the reserves on only the second day? Jesus, just how bad was it?

How bad? Long hours of total tension, the constant threat of death, cold, light rain, clinging sand, and another night without sleep as the *banzai*, once again, failed to materialize.

On Wednesday, high surf added more confusion to the chaos on the beach where wrecked and smashed vehicles floated in the wash, booming in to threaten any vehicle trying to land, a hell's scrapground. The beaches were still under fire from the mountain, destroyers and cruisers were still shelling Suribachi. Planes strafed, rocketted, bombed within a hundred yards of the front-line positions. Suribachi boasted the thickest and strongest cement defenses yet seen in the Pacific war.

You could hear the Japs inside the mountain. Tony Stein put aside his stinger and poured flaming gasoline down the cracks in the rocks, was rewarded by agonized screams. He ran for more gasoline and went down, rolling, yelling his surprise, throwing the can of gasoline away from him. He looked at his shoulder in disbelief.

"Goddamn," he said "corpsman, corpsman," but he refused to let the first corpsman to reach him look at his wound.

He was holding his jacket out from his body when E.O. came up. "How's it hanging, buddy?" Tony asked.

"Where are you hit?" E.O. said, digging for sulfa.

"Just a scratch. Put a little of that magic powder on it."

E.O. saw, to his relief, that though it was more than a scratch, it wasn't bad. "The million-dollar one, Tony," he said.

"Just put some stuff on and bandage it, huh?"

"You're going back, Tony. There's a piece of shrapnel still in there."

"Dig it out."

"No. You're going back."

"Shit." He pushed E.O.'s hand away, started to crawl toward his stinger. E.O. called a sergeant.

"This man's hit," he said. "He has shrapnel in his shoulder and it has to come out and he won't go back."

"Listen, asshole," the sergeant growled, jerking Tony away from the stinger. "Hit the beach. That's an order."

Later they were at the base of the mountain. E.O. was dozing, dead tired, the sound of the battle still loud in the dark when he heard movement and the challenge. He heard Tony's voice cry out, "Taft, from Ohio, like me." The password was the name of any American President. He crawled to meet Tony.

"You dumb son-of-a-bitch," he said.

"Hey, no sweat," Tony said. "A doc dug it out. Said it wasn't all that bad." He fumbled in a pocket. "Here, feel it." E.O. took the small ragged piece of metal.

"They won't touch me now," Tony said, giving an uncharacteristic high giggle. "That was the one with my name on it."

E.O. giggled too. He felt better. Now they were both going to be okay. He felt for his pocket. "I know what you mean." He said, ready to show Tony the one with his name on it. It wasn't there. The entire pocket was gone, chewed off. He'd felt the bullet earlier that day but hadn't paid much attention. And it now was gone. Suddenly the night seemed darker, more threatening. He giggled again, this time at himself. Hell, it had had his name on it and it hadn't hurt him, so what difference did it make if he'd lost it? Silly superstition. He'd made it to the reef and back several times. They wouldn't get him on this God-damned shitpile of an island.

Friday, D-plus four. From a position just a few feet in from the surf, still dangerous with floating debris, Mark Fillmore stood up into a gray sky and saw them, like ants, high on the side of Suribachi. Near him Secretary of the Navy Forrestal watched. Then the patrol disappeared over the rim of the crater. Long minutes passed. And then, seen by thousands on land and sea, six men thrust a piece of pipe into the soft sand near the north rim and

the American flag unfolded in the light breeze. From the ships offshore there came the sound of whistles and horns and bells.

"This means," said Forrestal, "that there will be a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years."

But up top, even as a Marine photographer from *Leatherneck* magazine snapped pictures of the flag raising, two Japs dashed from a cave hurling grenades.

A Marine officer, sure that some son-of-a-bitch was going to steal that flag, gave orders to get another one, replace the flag on Suribachi with it and preserve the original for the Marines. Thus it was that Private First Class Ira H. Hayes, the Indian from Arizona, and his enemy, nineteen-year-old Franklin R. Sousley of Kentucky, joined four other Marines in a second flag raising, witnessed and photographed by Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press.

There was still a battle going on and Rosenthal didn't even have a chance to get the names of the Marines in the picture, didn't know what he had in his camera. But when the picture was developed on Guam someone quickly saw what it was. Soon the world would see it.

But it had been the first flag raising that brought tears to many eyes, that raised cheering in foxholes. And it did not mark the end of the battle. It was only a symbol. The glory part of the battle of Iwo was over.

Secretary Forrestal left that afternoon. Task Force 58 had pulled out the day before, Tokyo-bound again. The Marines were atop Suribachi, and the situation was well in hand. But someone failed to tell that to Kuriyashi's men. In the center of the island death poured out from more than eight hundred pillboxes, ringing the airfield.

Mark had had enough. Once again he'd watched the storming of Cemetery Ridge and once again he saw the cost. A Marine lay on the slope of a terrace, left leg pulled up as if he were trying to crawl, although he would never crawl again. A Japanese, small, rather plump, clothing blown away except for his leggings, lay as if asleep beside a blasted pillbox and around him were shards, legs, arms, a dead Marine with his helmet flattened. In a trench near the beach, combat doctors and corpsmen worked over lines of men on stretchers. The beach was still chaos, littered by smashed equipment. And inland the battle

sounds thundered over the barren rocks and sand, and it wasn't a decent sort of battle. In a jungle the dead had the decency to be invisible, hidden by growth. Here they were all too visible, having been smashed in barrenness, in full view. Marine 75's roared, flame throwers hissed and bubbled, the planes screamed in and blasted, and the incredible din seemed to grow inside Mark's head. Yet he could not leave.

He went inland. From time to time he would go back to the ship to file his stories and to rest. Not once did he attach himself to any particular unit or any individual. Old hard-luck Mark Fillmore was not going to bring the Japs down on any more friends.

His stories were typically Fillmore. They found their place in the stateside papers, although Iwo was the most heavily covered event of the war.

"We are told here," Mark Fillmore wrote, as the unspectacular part of the job got underway in what every Marine of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th divisions would later remember as the terrible two weeks, "that there is much criticism of the handling of the battle for Iwo Jima. It is even said that responsible men are calling on the President to relieve those in command and put the Marine Corps under the command of Douglas MacArthur.

"This correspondent would be the first to admit, having witnessed some of it, that the recapture of the Philippines was a job well done. But to cast slurs upon the United States Marines, to draw odious comparisons between the conquest of Tarawa or Iwo Jima and the entirely different Philippine campaign, is an act of the rankest ignorance.

"No one, not Douglas MacArthur, not General Lee himself, could have done a necessary and brutal job with more efficiency and with less loss of life."

Tony Stein's company had been hit hard at Suribachi. As on Tarawa, there was really no place to hide, but they found what shelter they could around the slope of the mountain, coming under fire occasionally from guns to the north. Tony was pleased when they got orders to move out. Other units had been slogging their way up the island foot by foot, cave by cave. And now it was A Company's turn. They hit a hill to the north of the No. 2 Airfield in a smart little fight, gained the top. The Japanese called it Osaka Yama. On the Marine maps it was

Hill 362A. Behind it a ravine fell some eighty feet. The sides of the ravine were filled with caves that held Japanese. The bottom of the ravine was blocked by an anti-tank ditch. The only way forward, toward the sea, was around the ravine, along the shoulders of a ridge.

E.O. was close enough to hear the company commander call for volunteers. He held his breath. Sure enough, Tony yelled, "Yo," and readied his stinger.

"You dumb bastard," E.O. told him.

"No sweat, kid. Just stand by. If I need you I'll sing out loud and clear," Tony said. He led a twenty-man patrol out to clear the ridge of snipers and was soon lost from view in the uneven, barren rocks. There was firing. When men began to come back, some of them wounded, E.O. kept looking. He crawled over to a man and asked about Tony.

"Up there," the man said, just before passing out. He had taken a small-caliber round through his cheek. Blood poured out when he spoke. E.O. stuffed the wound and powdered it and crawled out, climbing the ridge. He began to feel the heat of it, hear the sharp crack of rounds passing close overhead, made like a snake, keeping as close to the sandy rocks as possible. He could hear the chatter of Tony's stinger, cursed himself for not remembering to bring some ammo. The damned stinger used it up at a terrible rate.

He crawled past two dead Marines, and the sound was closer. "Tony," he yelled. The only answer was the incessant fire, the storm of sound that seemed to have gone on forever. He saw Tony as he peered around a rock. They'd moved into the interlacing fire of two pillboxes and he had scant cover in a small hollow. Machine-gun bullets dusted the sides of the small hole. He could see four dead Marines close by. "Tony, damnit," he yelled, "run for it."

Tony turned his head, smiled, waved for E.O. to get back and, with a look of determination, rose, shouting, rushing for the nearest pillbox, stinger chattering. Incredibly, he made it, sprayed the slits with the stinger and fell, crawling, as machine-gun fire from the other pillbox danced around him, sent dust spurting.

It was easy to see that he was hit. He crawled on. E.O. yelled, "Come on, Tony, get the hell back here."

"Damn, damn, damn," E.O. was yelling as he ran,

zigzagged, felt a lance of fire across one cheek, tumbled headlong into the small hole to bang his knee painfully against Tony's stinger.

He raised a hand. There was blood on his cheek, but the wound was slight, a crease across his cheekbone. His knee hurt more. Tony was breathing, his eyes closed.

"Where you hit?"

Eyes opening. "Get back, kid."

"Where are you hit, damnit?"

"Got—me," Tony said. There was blood on his leg. Shock. Lifting the material, slashing it. Not too bad. Bone not broken. Stuff it, powder it. Machine gun dancing alongside the hole sending dust into his eyes. Blood running down the leg above the neat small-caliber hole, too much blood. Fumbling with the jacket, raising it to see that he'd been stitched across the stomach. Oh, Jesus.

"Tony, you've got to help. You've got to help me. I can't carry you. You'll have to help." Tugging, trying to get him on his feet. A sharp tug on his arm, looking down in surprise to see blood welling up, falling.

"I . . . didn't . . . call you, kid. Don't . . . need you."

A Jap grenade, E.O. saw it, arcing high, tumbling end over end. He tried to catch it, fumbled it, grabbed it, threw it, and it went off just over the rocks with a roar that numbed his ears. And then another grenade and he had time only to bat at it.

FIVE

YES, he had to stay. If you wanted to see that it was far from over, you just had to risk your ass to go onto the island, into that mad and seemingly random activity on the beaches that, in spite of its chaotic appearance, was being sorted into order. You made your way inland, up toward the airfields, and began to feel the breath of Jap fire, whistling and roaring down from the northern hills. You saw a squad-sized unit that had once been a company, now being led by a three-stripe sergeant.

It was big shit to have the Secretary of the Navy himself come onto the beach and watch the flag raising on Suribachi, just as if the Japs had consented to allow the

Marines to stage it for him. And to make grand and glorious statements about there being a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years. But meanwhile, back on the shitpile, men were still being blown apart. Some units changed commanding officers so often the men didn't even know the new man's name. The 5th Division lost six officers in one day's engagement, and the 4th was beating its bloody head against Hill 382 and Turkey Knob.

The job that was to have taken ten days to two weeks had now used up the month of February. On the northern end of the island huge emplacements had not been touched by the bombardments and the bombings and, meanwhile, the navy was off glory-hunting in a turkey shoot at Okinawa. They got some damned good photos to be used in an invasion that was only a month away, and then bugged off for Ulithi, still fighting the battle of publicity against a rapidly ending war in Europe. And Marines were taking out blockhouses with grenades and flame throwers and sheer guts, all the time watching their units diminish as the dead went under the sands in trenches covered by bulldozers, and the wounded streamed outward to the waiting ships.

Offshore, Jap planes all the way from Tokyo, having refueled in the Bonins, used the *kamikaze* tactics that had first been noted in the Philippines to attack the carriers, two flaming planes hitting the old *Saratoga* near the waterline. She was able to keep her power, to survive another grazing hit of the flight deck by a Jap pilot going to meet his ancestors, and even to recover some of her planes. But another carrier, the *Bismarck Sea*, hurriedly taking aboard planes that could not land on *Saratoga* or two other carriers, rushed planes below that had not been emptied of gasoline, took a square hit from a *kamikaze*, blew up internally and went down. Jap planes strafed survivors in the water.

A hospital ship had set sail for Guam with a full load, over six hundred of the more seriously wounded men. The *Solicitude*, because of her surgical crew, off-loaded repaired men and took on more, the products of the Meat Grinder around Hill 382 and Turkey Knob and the Amphitheater. A hundred yards was a good day. One day, while the 5th was "taking it easy," not pressing the attack, they got by with only 163 casualties. In seven days the Marines took about two-fifths of the island, at

a cost of eight thousand killed or wounded. Whole blood was available to medical stations, an evacuation hospital had been set up on the beach. An army field hospital began landing. And the Seabees were working on the airfields.

The first large plane to land was a C-47 rigged to carry casualties back to the Marianas. It had to land downwind to avoid heavy Jap fire on the upwind side. But the real purpose of the entire Iwo Jima operation became dramatically evident two weeks after D-Day, while the Marines were still engaged in one of their most desperate battles to the north, when a picket ship guarding the air-sea rescue frequency heard: "Gatepost, Gatepost, this is Nine Bakecable. We are a monster, short on fuel."

The gleaming monster came in low over Suribachi. First Lieutenant Fred Malo looked down on the short, dusty runway with barely disguised doubt, but his bomb-bay doors had refused to close in ice and sleet over Tokyo. The extra drag had used fuel. Compounding the problem, the valve to the reserve tanks would not open. His life and the lives of ten men depended on that dusty runway down there with Seabee dozers all around, men beginning to gather. He weighed sixty-five tons. He looked at his copilot and tried to grin and brought her around again, the *Dinah Might*, half a million dollars' worth of airplane, and eleven men. He took her down past the west slope of Suribachi and slammed her down hard, hard, on the extreme south end of the strip. The copilot was setting the brakes to "maximum" as she screamed rubber down the strip, one wing felling a telephone pole with a clanging crash, mortar and artillery shells beginning to throw sand a few yards past the end of the runway. He stopped with feet to spare, revved her engines, turned, and taxied back toward Suribachi.

Not wanting the crew to be caught inside if one of the Jap shells hit, Malo ordered them out. The last to get off was a tall two-rocker sergeant from the tail-gun position. He stood near the plane, looking musingly toward the hills to the north, from which came the rumble of an artillery fight. All around him men were cheering and yelling and crowding in to take a good look at that first monster. A Marine came up to shake his hand. The kid was wounded, one arm in a sling.

"Hear it's been rough," Clay Swan said.

"Shit, same old stuff," the Marine said. "Just a matter of digging the bastards out of their holes. You guys been to Tokyo?"

Clay nodded, ducking as a shell blew sand some hundred yards away and the engineer scrambled back aboard *Dinah Might* to work on that damned gas valve. Iwo didn't look like a good place to take a short leave. The pilot felt the same way. He was answering questions from eager Seabees about the runway, told them it was a helluva good job, declined with a smile an offer to stay overnight and have an extra thousand feet of take-off room by morning. The valve was fixed in a half hour and the plane was still in one piece, the wing undamaged by contact with the telephone pole. They'd built those monsters well. She left with fifty feet of takeoff room to spare at the end of the runway and Clay Swan, in his turret, got a good view of a decimated island with artillery booming in the north and wreckage scattered everywhere. Jap antiaircraft fire from the north end began unsuccessfully to chase *Dinah Might*.

On the *Solicitude*, word spread that one of the big bombers had landed on Iwo. Liz had a few minutes to go on deck and watch, in the distance, as the big plane made it and climbed to become a silver, sun-reflecting dot. Then she went below. They were still getting casualties from the Meat Grinder and she was, in spite of her recent short sleep, dulled, bone-tired, going only on caffeine and the knowledge that it had to be done. On deck the wounded were still coming in over both sides. Below, the operating room was, once again, carpeted with a slick, red coat of blood and a corpsman was mopping it up. Nick Carew was at work performing his hourly miracles and she was back in it as if it had been going on all her life, as if the world consisted of nothing but bright lights, gleaming instruments, and young men ripped apart as only war can mangle.

Liz had no idea that Mark had chosen that afternoon to come aboard the ship. He had come from observing the assault that continued, day after day, against Hill 382 and the defensive complex built around it, thinking that there was a story aboard the ship, a story he'd written before, but that bore repeating. He was watching the off-loading of wounded from the stream of boats coming out from the smoking, stinking island when the *Dinah Might*

took off. He watched the bursts of flak chase the big plane and whispered, "Go, baby, go." He heard himself joining in the cheering of the men on deck when the monster made it, pulling high and away, and set off toward the bases on Saipan and Tinian. It was a moment of sheer exhilaration. And then he looked down and two stretcher-bearers were rushing past, one bloody from the waist down, a third man running alongside the stretcher holding a plasma bottle high. Back to reality.

He watched the lifting of the wounded for a few minutes and, knowing a hurt in his gut, an anger, a feeling of utter and helpless desperation, made his way forward and into the hatch leading to the operating room areas. A captain with a great bulk of bloody bandages on his thigh recognized him.

"Hey, Fillmore, you been up front today?"

Mark knelt beside the man, pulled out his cigarettes and offered. He lit the Lucky, for the officer's hand was shaking too much to hold it. He put it into the dry-lipped mouth.

"Not today," he said. "Nothing's changed. Still rough going."

"Look," the captain said, "tell these yo-yos I'm doing fine. Tell 'em to get to those boys first." Behind him in the line of stretchers, around him in the waiting area, were men whose lungs bubbled froth through lax lips, others who lay comatose with head wounds.

"Wilco," he said. "You take it easy, hear?"

"I'm short about two pounds of leg"—the captain grinned—"but I'll be ready for the next one."

He walked around the area. A private with an arm mangled and bent was sitting up against a bulkhead, his eyes feverishly bright. "Hey, Mark," he called, "put my name in the papers so my girl will know I'm all right."

"Where'd you get it?" Mark asked, squatting in front of the private.

"On the fucking beach," the private said with a mixture of resentment and surprise. "On the fucking beach where it was supposed to be secure."

Mark took name and home town. He talked with others, making notes, always with his admiration and astonishment growing. There was a look in the eyes of the wounded men, a dazed, disbelieving look. Some of them had hit the beaches for the first time on Iwo. They were not the

same men who'd gone ashore, were different somehow, altered, never to be the same, even if their wounds were not crippling or disfiguring. And while he chatted with the men who could talk, the movement went on ceaselessly, men being brought in. A man died and corpsmen covered his face, removed him from the waiting area. The man he'd seen carried in with plasma running into his veins was lying toward the rear of the room. A nurse with a bloody uniform came out, walked around, her face expressionless and pale. A corpsman motioned to her, whispered. She bent over the silent man on the stretcher and shook her head. The man was passed over. Mark halted a busy corpsman.

"What about him?" he asked, pointing to the man. The plasma bottle was almost empty.

The corpsman swallowed, had difficulty in speaking. "No chance," he said.

He remembered. Liz had told him. If it was obvious that a man did not have a chance to live, if he were so torn, so mutilated that nothing could save him, then others who did have a chance were taken first. He knelt beside the silent man, saw a broken and mutilated face, saw blood on the entire upper torso.

"Hey, buddy," he whispered.

The man was silent, eyes closed. He rose. There was no dramatic death rattle, only a heave of the torn chest, a gusty sigh that seemed to go on for a long, long time and then the chest was not moving. Corpsmen covered his face, carried him out. Behind him a man moaned in sudden pain and a corpsman knelt, administered a painkiller with a gleaming needle.

Mark had had enough. He'd come on board for two reasons, to see the wounded, to write about a few of them, and, perhaps, to get a glimpse of Liz, to say, "Hi, kid, how's it going?" But the unrelenting flow of wounded told him she'd be too busy, and it was impossible to write about all of them, thousands of them, God only knew how many more thousands before the bloody work of reducing the fortifications on the north end of the island was done.

He caught the nurse's sleeve as she moved swiftly past him. "Do you know Lieutenant Liz Wilder?"

"Yes."

"When you see her, tell her Mark Fillmore was here. Tell her I'll try to see her before you sail."

"She's on duty."

"I know, just tell her."

"I could, perhaps, relieve her for a few minutes."

"No, no, just tell her." She nodded. She was about to go back through the hatch when another group, another boatload, began to arrive, men stacking up in all the available room.

"Nurse, take a look at this one," a corpsman said.

"Excuse me," she said, moving toward the litter carried by two corpsmen. She spread back the covering, shook her head. The corpsmen seemed unable to look at one another.

"He's a corpsman," one of them said. The nurse shook her head sadly.

"I . . . are a . . . reject." It was a young voice, a voice distorted, grown old, weak, but it sounded very familiar. Mark took two steps, looked down, felt his heart flip.

He was blinded, one socket almost empty, a bloody mass, lid torn away.

"Hold it a minute," Mark said. There wasn't much left of the face, but there was enough. "E.O.?" he asked.

"Who . . . ?"

"Mark Fillmore," he said. And to the corpsmen: "Where's he hit?"

"Where isn't he?" one of the young men asked, lifting the blanket. His uniform was shredded. His hands were clasped over his lower abdomen, holding tightly, one finger missing and the stump oozing blood.

"Mark," he said, so weak that Mark had to bend to hear. "Lost it. Lost . . . it."

"Take it easy, E.O."

"Mark . . . write . . . write . . ."

"Yeah, I will, E.O."

"Tony . . . write . . . Tony. Write . . . Tony dead."

"Tony?"

"Old . . . Tough . . . Tony."

He could see the things that oozed out between E.O.'s clenched fingers. He swallowed to prevent bitter bile from rising. "Where are you taking him?" he asked.

One of the corpsmen nodded toward a door. There were only dead men beyond that door. "Goddamn it, no," he said, his voice rising.

"Orders, sir," a corpsman said. They put the stretcher down.

Mark was having difficulty seeing. He hadn't wept for any of them, not for Billy Gene Carnes, not for the men on Tarawa or any of the other islands.

"Hang on, buddy," he said, patting E.O.'s shoulder, his hand coming away bloody. He ran from the room, pushed open the door into the corridor leading to the operating suites, caught a nurse. "Which one is Liz Wilder in?"

"You shouldn't be in here," she said.

"Which one, goddamnit?" She drew back, looked around as if seeking help, saw the wild look in his eyes, pointed toward a door.

"Get her," he ordered. "Tell her it's vital. I don't care what you have to do, get her."

She backed away, pushed open a door, still looking back at him. Liz was standing in the doorway, a puzzled look on her face until she saw him. And then into the lined agony of her face there came a flash of sheer gladness. "Oh, Mark, I can't—"

"It's E.O.," he said. "They've rejected him."

The lines were back and in her eyes was a look of horror. She moved toward him as if sleepwalking, and he took her hand, led her through the waiting area and through the door to the room of the dead, where they'd placed E.O. She fell to her knees beside him, cradled his head, tears running silently down her face.

"It's Liz, E.O."

"Liz?"

He was, now, back in the Meat Grinder, in the hole with Tony, and the grenade was coming and all he could do was bat at it and it flew up and away, turning as if in slow motion and all he saw was a white, searing blast and he couldn't feel anything. He didn't know how much time had gone by but when he could extend a hand, having to use the middle finger because a finger was gone, he felt the cold, rigid feel of death. He couldn't see Tony. His guts were flaming and when he felt he could touch wetness and the round things, some of which were oozing vileness. And when next he knew anything a man was saying "Dead."

"No, no," he whispered.

"It's Liz," she said. "It's all right, E.O. It's all right,"

but it wasn't, and she knew it and it was astounding that he was still alive, for he *was* dead. There was nothing, nothing to be done.

"Liz, get him to a doctor," Mark said.

She looked up. "Yes."

"Reject," E.O. whispered. "Liz—"

"Yes, darling," she whispered.

"Dead room?"

"No, no," she said.

"Don't want. . . ."

"Get corpsmen," she told Mark. He opened the door and called out, motioning two corpsmen into the room.

"Move him to the head of the line," she ordered. They picked him up and E.O., incredibly, tried to sit up.

"No," he yelled, his voice strong, intense. "Won't have it." He fell back. "Can't—do it. Liz. . . ."

She swallowed a sob.

"Liz?"

"Yes, yes."

"Not—dead room."

"No."

"Still . . . got . . . my—" He paused, and she bent closer. "—records?"

She straightened with determination. "Come with me," she ordered the corpsmen, and they followed her back through the carnage of the prep area, down a corridor. The lounge was empty. Mark followed them into the room. "Here," she ordered, and the litter was placed in the center of the lounge, on the hard linoleum. She sat, one leg tucked under, beside him, put her hand on his shoulder.

"Play." He whispered. "Glenn—" And for a moment she thought he was gone. Then the mouth moved, whispering, and she leaped up, Mark taking her place beside E.O.

He had always insisted that the records be kept in their paper jackets and it seemed a major sadness for her to find the records stacked bare on top of each other. One was broken. She filed through them and picked the first Miller disk she found, the title blurring with her tears. And then the scratch of the needle on the edge, an incongruous, blaring, trumpet section intro and riffing saxes. She turned back to his side. His lips distorted a smile, swollen, one torn and bruised.

"Oh, yeah," he said.

She knelt by Mark's side. The bouncy tune was too loud.

"Me and Vivian Ruth," E.O. whispered.

"Yes?" she urged.

"Tore—this up."

"You dance well together," Liz said, as the riffing saxes paused, a bell rang, and the voices yelled out, "Pennsylvania six-five-thousand."

That bruised, torn smile. "Oh, yeah."

She looked to see Mark's eyes swimming. Without thinking she reached out her hand and he took it in a grip that caused her to wince and then squeeze back, welcoming his strength, the pain of his grip, for, although she'd seen so many of them die it had never been so close. She herself felt as if she would welcome death, to stop the hurting.

A trumpet swung into a solo.

"Hey," E.O. said, his voice suddenly strong, sounding almost natural. "Hey," he said, with a rising inflection, his body heaving, as if he would rise. "Glenn, my man, gimme some skin, man."

The telephone rang for him but he didn't hear the band members repeat, "Pennsylvania six-five-thousand."

She knelt, fingers going numb in Mark's deathgrip of a hold, looking on the mutilated face, unnecessary to close his eyes, unnecessary to check for a pulse for the life was obviously gone and she could see him kneeling on the bloody floor, weeping, saying, "I can't get it cleaned up. I can't get it all up."

"Oh, goddamn," Mark whispered. "Oh, goddamn it to hell."

She pulled away. The record had finished. "Pennsylvania six-five-oh-oh-oh," swinging to scratching, the needle repeating the last groove and she picked up the head and grabbed the record and smashed it to the floor and stood there, breasts heaving, to see Mark's face, wet, strained, and he was moving toward her to keep her from falling and it came wailing out of her, over two years of anguish and the knowledge of death and blood and disfigurement and she was doing her best to claw her way into him, hands digging at his fatigue jacket and her mind filled with blood, E.O. kneeling, sobbing, "I can't get it cleaned up."

After a long, long time she said, "He volunteered. He could have stayed here on the ship."

"I know."

"Oh, Mark, let's go home. I've had enough. Just take me home."

For a moment he didn't answer, for his mind was churning too, and to his shame he was thinking of himself, not E.O. dead, not what was once E.O. lying there behind him on the hard, cold linoleum floor. Thinking what a fool he'd been to ever believe he could stop loving her, finding, with her in his arms, that he had something to cling to, knew then that he wanted to cling to her forever. And Cicily? She would be hurt and how could he hurt her?

And out there was Iwo, and the Meat Grinder, and he knew he couldn't leave, not with men dying, not with Marines wondering why Howlin' Mad didn't commit the last of the reserves to relieve units that had lost all officers and most of the men, while the Japs confounded all the brass by fighting on bravely and desperately for every inch of ground, not being Japlike at all, extracting the last ounce of blood before burning in the oily blast of a flame thrower or being ripped from the ground like dead moles by heavy TNT charges. And Mark felt, then, that he might die on Iwo and he couldn't die leaving it unsaid.

"Liz, Liz."

"Got to move him."

"Yes, in a minute." He pushed her away, held her at arms' length. "I love you so very much."

She wailed, clung to him again. "Oh, yes, yes," she cried.

"I got lost for a while—"

"I was a fool, Mark."

"Meaning?"

"That I love you so very much, my dear, dear, lovely Mark."

"I can take you home. We can leave."

"No, we can't."

"When this is over we can get married and they'll kick you out."

"I want to go home now, now." She knew she was being contradictory, wanting to leave one minute, feeling

her duty the next, knowing she was needed badly in the operating room.

"When it's over."

"You're going back to the island."

"Yes."

She drew herself together, looked into his eyes. "We can't do anything else, can we?"

"No," he said, looking down at E.O. "We can't do anything else."

There was not even a kiss, a kiss would have been out of place. Although both knew that E.O., would have smiled, it was impossible to kiss in front of those unseeing, mutilated eyes and they carried him, he was so small, so light, to the room for the dead and then Mark was going, back aboard a boat on its way to the beach for more casualties.

He'd think about Cicily later. No Dear Jane, that was for sure. She was a Smith woman and she deserved better than that brushoff, deserved an explanation face to face.

Mark stayed until the end, caught up in the last, unexpected battle when Japs filtered out of bypassed holes and attacked positions near Airfield #2, hitting Air Corps units, Seabees, a hospital, where they machine-gunned tents and ambulances. There had, after all, been one final *banzai*, and before Marines could be organized to stop it over fifty airmen and construction men had been killed.

"Iwo Jima," Mark wrote, "was an expensive piece of land. The Marines bought it at a cost of 2,500 wounds and 550 lives per square mile. But each day, with the arrival of a crippled B-29 from raids on Japan, its value is proven.

"In this, the toughest operation to date in the Pacific war, there is no one who can disagree with Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz, who said, 'Uncommon valor was a common virtue.'"

And then he began to think of going east, began to sort out transportation facilities, used pull to discover the whereabouts of the *Solicitude*. She was in Hawaii. And so, it was Hawaii for Mark. He would have to meet with two women there, one meeting so desired that he ached with need of it, the other a great heaviness in his heart.

SIX

SHE stood in a drizzle of rain. She'd pulled her hair back and high, tight to her head, so the dampness would not frazzle it, and looked out over the faces. The men, too, were heedless of the drizzle. Behind her the bass man sounded at first as if he were merely noodling, thunking the strings full and loudly. Art stood beside her, gazing up at the lowering sky. The drummer was poised, holding only brushes. She wore her silver lamé, face lifted, a smile on her face. Melody began to form. Brushes came in softly. The deep, gut-jarring notes of the bass spoke the lyrics for those who knew them. Most did, for they were of a generation to whom the words of a lovesong meant something. Art Damling came in, building note by note, and the three musicians sounded like more, Vivia swaying, adding her clear, throaty voice, humming counter-melody. From somewhere in the rear of the troop assembly a clear male voice sang the words until, with a swooping lilt of transposition, Vivia came in on the second repetition.

"The mere *idea* of you, and I forget to do
The little, ordinary things that everyone ought to do."

His face was so clear to her and she could almost feel his presence, for, as Pacific distances go, he was quite near, just to the north. Awaiting her in the lagoon was the PBY that would sweep her northward. The thought of it glowed like a candle and the rain was a soft caress on her face so that, when it ceased, she was almost sorry.

"You, soldier, where are you from?"

"Kansas City."

"And you admit it?"

She loved them, each and every one of them, and she was in love with Clay. In the dressing room, in her bag, were all of his letters, well-read letters, letters with tear-drops of sheer happiness spotting them.

She departed from her new custom of joining some of the men in an EM club, or a USO club to sing, dance,

talk, blaze her smile at them. She could not wait. The PBY lifted off and each turn of the props brought him closer. The plane landed in glorious sun—how could it be otherwise?—and she was ashore, using her blazing smile to get transportation to the airfield, finding his unit. He was, she found, out on a raid. But that didn't bother her. She did not worry about him. She'd waited all her life for Clay Swan and no war would take her away from him.

It was a glorious sight. They came in low from the northwest, neat formations of them, huge, gleaming, proud machines. One of them carried her Clay. An Air Force captain was counting on his fingers, shaking his head.

"Well, maybe they landed on Iwo," he said.

"What?" she asked, smiling, smiling, as a gleaming B-29 made the approach, touched down.

"Nothing," he said, but there were holes in the formation.

"What's your friend's plane again?" he asked.

"*The Valiant Vivia*." She favored the captain with her foolish, happy smile. "They named it after me."

"Ah," the captain said, gazing intently as the monsters wheeled and waited their landing turns.

"Ah," he said with relief, handing the glasses to Vivia. "There, fourth in line, circling."

The plane leaped closer as she put the glasses to her eyes. She could see, on the gleaming nose, the long-legged, cartoonlike pinup picture and the words. She thought it was wonderful that Clay's pilot thought enough of him to have allowed him to name the plane. But then maybe some of the other members of Clay's crew had heard her sing too.

She found herself holding her breath as *Valiant Vivia's* turn arrived. She let it out in a sigh as the plane seemed to kiss the runway, far off, looming closer and closer. Then, with the captain's hand on her arm, she was being helped into a jeep and, wind in her hair, moving out across the tarmac while *Valiant Vivia* taxied, turned, motors falling silent one by one. And men were coming out of the plane shedding flak jackets. She knew him by the way he moved. She'd known him only three days and she could tell it was him by the way he moved his head, stretched his arms. She was out and running before the jeep had stopped rolling, crying, "Clay, Clay," men whistling and grinning.

He turned at the sound of her voice, his face startled, unbelieving, then grinning widely and she seemed to float as he began to move toward her, met her as she threw herself into his arms, both feet leaving the ground, his strong arms catching her and she was laughing and weeping at the same time and his lips had a taste of cordite. Then he was swinging her around, laughing, men crowding around yelling and hooting and whistling and the pilot was there, hand outstretched, grinning, saying something about how nice it was to see the plane's namesake and how the picture didn't do justice and she was kissing them all on the cheek and hugging them and telling them how she loved them, each and every one, and there was Clay, grinning and grinning, not taking his eyes from her.

Excused from the debriefing session, he walked with her, hand in hand, carrying his equipment in the other hand, hair mussed, smelling of oil and sweat and burned powder, and she wanted to be in his arms, to literally eat him, chew on him with little nibbling teeth. Laughing now and then, squeezing his hand and looking up at his face, she had that damned silly little waltz running through her mind. Why was nobody dancing? When they'd gained the privacy of a hallway, he kissed her, long and hungrily, and then someone was pounding him on the back, one of the crew, telling him he shouldn't keep the plane's namesake all to himself.

It was a fun party. Officers and men together, the *Valiant Vivia's* crew thrusting out their chests in pride. Lots of planes were named for beautiful girls, but no other crew had its plane's namesake on Tinian. She got happily giddy for the first time in months. Someone had rounded up the musicians. She sang and led them in singing, danced to the record player with some of them, clung to Clay as Miller's clarisaxes poured out sweetness and "Blue Rain."

"I love you," she told them, singing again, "each and every one of you, but I'm gonna marry this one." Pulling a blushing Clay forward from the crowd to kiss him as men whooped in envy and someone called out, "Lucky bastard."

"Bet your sweet ass." Clay beamed.

"I want to be alone with you," she whispered to him as they danced. But she was public property. Had he been an officer, there might have been a way. But he was

merely a two-rocker sergeant, didn't even have a private room, and he had a mission to fly the next day. She didn't worry. They were scheduled for three days on Tinian, and the first full day began when she awoke to the sound of the mighty engines and left her quarters to watch them climb into the still, dark skies, the sun only a hint below the horizon. Unable to spot *Valiant Vivia*, she whispered, "We'll take care of you, me and *Valiant Vivia*." And the day became something very special for her as she did a show for thousands and, in another of those incredible coincidences, looked out at the end of one number to see a handsome nurse in dress blue who blew a kiss and waved excitedly. Life was so damned good she wanted to bawl as she finished her song and called out, "Liz, Liz Wilder, come up here." Liz did, by God, and it was old Mark standing beside her.

"Fellas," she cried into the mike, "if my singing gives you a headache, here's the girl who can hand out the A.P.C.'s. My sister, Liz Wilder."

Whistles, cheers, whoops. And old Mark grinning happily and clapping.

Old Mark had been on the way to Hawaii after Iwo, first stop Saipan, when his long and serious service to the U.S. Marine Corps and the navy paid off once more. A message for him on Saipan had caught up with him just after the hospital plane he'd hitched a ride on had been refueled and was ready for him to board.

Old Liz had started for Hawaii too before the end of the Iwo tragedy, and had received new orders just as the ship got underway, had been taken off by a Higgins boat, transferred to an escort destroyer bound for the Marianas. There, at Tinian, she awaited a new rank insignia. As Lieutenant Commander Liz Wilder she was senior nurse in charge of the navy hospital and, having had that moment in Mark's arms at Iwo, she'd used her pull to get word to Mark.

She had not known if he'd get the message in time, and the days went by with her looking over the hospital facilities, getting to know the doctors and nurses, doing a little butt-chewing over laxness. "Just because this isn't a front-line hospital doesn't mean you can slop through the procedures, ladies. I suggest you cut the crap and

buckle down or you'll be getting one-way orders for the West Coast."

Unpleasant duties are always easy to put off. At first, receiving the message from Liz, he thought to go on to Hawaii and get it over with Cicily. But all wounds are not visible, and even wounds of the soul need treatment. The treatment Mark needed was Liz. He hitched a ride up to Tinian. She was in her office, brow furrowed over paperwork, the door open so she could feel she was keeping an eye on things, and to show that she was accessible to her subordinates. He stood there in the doorway for a long time, just looking at her. There were sooty smudges under her eyes. She too had received her wounds at Iwo.

"With you in a moment," she said, feeling a presence but not looking up.

"Take your time," he said. Her head jerked up, mouth wide, breaking into a smile that quickly faded.

"Hi, kid," he said.

She rose, looking uneasy, nervously laying down her pen, then picking it up. Was she assuming too much? After all, their last meeting had been under highly emotional circumstances.

"Liz—"

"Wait," she said. "Before you say anything. Let's get one thing straight. During emotional times one says things—" She paused, unable to find words.

"Oh, shit, Liz," he said, moving toward her. And for a long, long, delicious kiss the war was nonexistent, the tiredness gone, the pain dulled.

"Can you get away?" he asked.

"Hell, I'm commanding officer. I can do anything I want to do."

He had not even tried to find quarters. She had a BOQ room to herself, made no effort to hide his presence there. She just didn't give a shit. In the room she poured an ounce of good brandy. Being a lieutenant commander had its rewards. He sipped. "Damned good," he said.

"Where did my message catch up with you?"

"Saipan. At the last moment," he said. Then, after a silence: "There's a lot to say, Liz."

"Let's not talk right now," she said.

"Okay."

They drank in silence. She poured another, lifted the

utilitarian GI mug. "To E.O.," she said. "And all the others."

And it was there, the ghastly figures. Not many had seen the completely tabulated list that, so soon after the fighting, was still tentative. "Seven thousand of them, Liz."

"So many?"

"Five thousand Marines."

"And E.O."

"And E.O., damnit."

"And more to come," she said. "Oh, goddamn."

"I've tried to tell myself that maybe you can care too much," he said. "I don't buy it." A little laugh. "But how else can you live with it?"

"I had to get off the ship," she said. "I asked for a transfer. I don't think I could take even one more island, Mark. It's too much. It's just too damned much."

"I know."

"At least here they're alive. Maybe missing some important parts of the anatomy, but alive."

"You did your share."

"And you?"

"What the hell have I done?" he asked bitterly. "A typewriter isn't much help to a man with his ass shot off."

"No," she said. "You've done a more important job than most. You've told them at home what it's really like. No bullshit. No glory. You've told it like it is and maybe twenty or twenty-five years from now when some politician wants to start another war they can look back and read what you've written and—"

"Shit," he exploded. "What I've written wrapped yesterday's fish."

"You won the Pulitzer."

"That and a dime," he said, "will buy you a cup of coffee."

She removed her jacket. She looked very, very female in the blouse. It was full day, a hot afternoon, a small fan not doing much to dispel the heat in the room.

"We're alive," she said.

"We're alive."

"I gave you a chance to reconsider."

"Yes," he said. "You did. I don't need it. I'm not an indecisive man, Liz. Really. Listen, I suppose this has to

be said. I was hurt at Tarawa. I was a little boy hurt and rejected and I went looking for comfort." He finished the brandy, held out his mug. "No, that's not fair. She was, and is, more than that, Liz. She's one of the more wonderful, more outrageously lovable girls I've ever known, and she's going to get the short end of this stick, because, God help her, she seems to love me."

There was momentary resentment, and then she could imagine how the girl would feel, knew, as a matter of fact, from that time in Hawaii when she saw Cicily Smith on Mark's arm and realized that she was, after all, in love with him.

"Well, I guess neither of us is too admirable," she said. "I guess it could be said that I'm to blame. I didn't have the sense to know how I felt about you until—"

He grinned. "Reminded you of Mary Sue Moore, didn't she?"

"Yes, damnit."

"No, I guess I'm not an admirable character," he said. "How can I set out to deliberately hurt her? How could I deliberately, on the other hand, hurt you? I got lost for a while, Liz. But all the time there was something inside me telling me I was being unfair to her, that it was you, you all the time. I try to tell myself that it was Tarawa, seeing those brave bastards wade that fucking bloody lagoon and—"

"I like the girl. She's nice, quite nice. But, damnit, I'm selfish." He started to speak. "Just listen for a moment, huh? We're going to stop talking. We'll have time to talk. The war's a damn long way from being over. Right now I'm wondering whether or not my little shower will hold both of us. If it will, I don't want to talk."

He wanted to forget, to forget Iwo and E.O. dying while Glenn Miller's band played on a scratchy record. He was in need of her, his Liz.

"I'll make myself real small."

It held them. It was a tight fit, but that was all right, and there was even a bar of civilian soap, softer, more aromatic, gentler, than GI soap. And in slick wetness he marveled at the firmness of her blue-veined breasts, the heat of her lips, and his hands found those time-honored handles that fit a man's hands so well, the rounded, firm-girl flesh of buttocks and he was lifting and kneading and then, with her wet hair wrapped in an olive-drab

GI towel, he was carrying her to her twin-sized bed. It was a marvel to him, for he, old Mark, was making her tremble, even as he trembled while they found their union, so long, long delayed, and used that ultimate closeness as it had been forever meant to be used, to weld more than flesh, to merge trembles and needs and loves and minds into one. To cling when it was over, whispering wonder, exploring shyly and softly, fingers, lips, tongue, the curve of body, the hairiness of a male leg all new to her, a strangely exciting thing. His leg between hers in quietness, her hand finding other interesting things, and love flowing from her, a happiness she'd never known. She was not frigid, old Liz, for all it took was old Mark and she was wanton, shameless, taking and giving and sleeping in a sea of unutterably blissful softness, waking to find his eyes devouring her face.

He wrote of the aircrews, the monsters and the men who kept them in the air, who patched the flak holes and put those bombers out again to kill a greater number of Japanese civilians than the number of lives lost in battle so far. He helped to cheer them on, for war is not waged without the encouragement, or at least the acceptance, of the civilian population.

He prayed to a God he scarcely credited to let the B-29's end it, rain fire and death until the emperor and Tojo and the Jap war planners saw the end of it. But he knew that it would not happen soon, for even as he stayed on Tinian to be near her, postponing his mission to break a nice lady's heart, he heard the rumblings. He even knew the target.

The obviously blissful love that glowed, radiated from Clay Swan and Vivia reflected from them, made both of them prone to laughter during the few days Vivia was on Tinian. Mark added to Vivia's growing fame with a layout complete with pictures, for the home papers. It called her the "acknowledged sweetheart of the Pacific." Just goddamned beautiful to see the love between those two kids. It made him wish he were twenty-four again. And it also bothered him, for she was still just a kid. Mark had heard about her admiral. He'd heard rumors that she had known other men after whatever it was that broke up her alliance with Bill Partier. But to look at her now, she was just a love-struck kid, a beautiful

kid, rendered even more beautiful by her reflection in the love-struck eyes of another kid who flew B-29 missions over Japan.

Men got killed every day over Japan, for the bastards were fighting for their very lives now. Just as they would fight when the Marines hit Okinawa.

So you couldn't get away from the war even, if you tried, and Miss Vivia—God, he hoped not—might just discover that.

Mark liked Clay Swan. And it was, Mark decided, a beautiful irony that the Marines who had died had saved the life of the man Vivia loved. Not once, but twice, for it seemed that the *Dinah Might* had made a second emergency landing on Iwo just a few days after Mark left the island.

"I'm alive because of Iwo," Clay said. "Next time you see a Marine, thank him for me."

"Wilco," Mark said. Thinking: How do you measure it? How do you equate the dead with the living? "Didn't get *Dinah Might* off?" he asked, trying to stem the tide of dark thoughts.

"Not right away. She was badly hurt. Malo left me there to guard her." Something in Clay's voice alerted Mark.

"And?" he asked.

"They're all dead," Clay said in a flat voice. "All that crew. Malo in a takeoff crash, the others in another plane over Kawasaki."

"Tough, kid," Mark said. "Damned tough."

"I showed my new crew a picture of Vivia and they named the plane, or let me name her, after her." He grinned. You didn't dwell on the rough stuff too long, except late at night when you couldn't sleep and thought about ten guys you'd known and sweated blood with, all dead. "Now I've got it made. How the hell can I get shot down in a plane named *Valiant Vivia*?"

"She'd will you home on one engine." Mark laughed. "You got it made, buddy."

And then Vivia was gone. Mark made it a point to be there when *Valiant Vivia* came back. She was a good-luck plane. Her missions were milk runs.

Mark had a wonderful few days on Tinian before the Marines sent a man to him. Not many correspondents got

what amounted to an engraved invitation to an invasion, but Mark was the Marine's man.

Liz could sense his indecision. "Hey," she told him, "there's a new ruling, just out. Married nurses are no longer shipped home immediately."

He was scratching his left foot, muttering imprecations against jungle rot and the lack of brains in the medical profession. If the medical people couldn't cure toe itch, what the hell good were they?

"Did you hear?" she asked. "It was sort of a proposal."

"You'd outrank me," he said.

"Okay, so you don't want to get married," she said, not really hurt, just wondering what he was thinking.

He couldn't tell her what he was thinking. It was a secret so highly guarded he was astounded that he knew, and he didn't know all of it. He knew only that there were those who wanted to cancel the Okinawa invasion because of a new super-weapon that was expected to be deployed within weeks, a couple of months at the most. He would never reveal to anyone that he'd been told, that it had even been hinted at. He would never write about it, never reveal the name of the very-high-ranking man who had told him, "It'll be over soon, Fillmore. Over."

"We can get married if you want to," he said.

"Gee, thanks."

"No, I mean we can. It's almost over. We can start adding up the cost pretty soon."

"You want to wait?"

He'd been asked that question once before. He felt confused. He would marry her, no doubt about it, but there was Okinawa, and he had a bad feeling, for some reason, about that one. Jap island. Civilian population. In Saipan, civilians had joined the soldiers in throwing themselves off the cliffs.

"How can you be sure it's almost over?" she asked. "There's still the home islands."

"I can't tell you how I know, but it is almost over. It's time to add up the cost. Like fifteen million dead soldiers."

Her hand on the nape of his neck, fingers massaging, she tried to get his mind off serious matters, but he talked about the dead, the military dead, civilian dead, post-war politics—anything to keep his mind off his itching toes and Okinawa.

"Goddamn, it's been magnificent at times, in spite of the

tragedy. It was the biggest story any newsman could ever hope to cover. How do you write the end to a story like this?"

"With vine-covered cottages and children," she said.

"I was thinking of E.O.," he said. "And Tony Stein. Bessenger at Tarawa."

"Mark, you don't have to go this time."

"I know, but it's going to be the last island, Liz, and the hell of it is it doesn't have to happen if they'd just wait."

"Which one?"

He smiled. "You know better than that."

"Yeah, sure. Probably the Ryukyus."

"No comment."

"You've done enough," she said. "You've done your share."

"E.O. did his share going to the reef at Tarawa," Mark said. "Tony Stein did his share getting his unit off the beach. They didn't have to do any more either."

"How soon?" she asked.

"Tonight."

He didn't notice for a while that she was weeping. "Hey," he said, "that's bad luck." He kissed her and grinned. "Be like your sister. She has such superb confidence that nothing will happen to her Clay that she doesn't even worry."

"I'm crying out of self-pity," Liz said. "I've just discovered that I'm a pretty hot number, after all, and you're taking it all away from me."

"Well, things are tough all over," he said, "but we can maybe store up some."

"Funny about sex," she said, as he pulled her close, "you can get hungrier for it than anything else in the world and be satisfied more completely and more quickly than with anything else in the world."

"About being satisfied, speak for yourself," he said. But she was right. And they talked, talked, talked, and the conversation came around to Vivian and Liz said she worried about Clay. The Japs on the home islands were like mother tigers defending the den.

"I don't think she could survive it if he got killed," she said.

"Yes, I worry about that too," he said. "Vivian doesn't realize that you don't fight a global war and come out of it unscathed, not unless you're an emotionless cretin. Now,

Vivia isn't that at all. But so far the war has been fun and games to her. But I think maybe someone should warn her. If Vivia gets hit with a blivet she'll be unprepared and it'll be that much worse for her."

SEVEN

THERE were Americans already in the Ryukyus, the 77th Infantry having landed on the Kerama Islands to the west of Okinawa, even as the Iwo Jima battle was winding down. Aboard the transports, Marine and army troops learned of their destination before the Divine Wind began to blow, hundreds of aircraft manned by death-seeking Japanese men plunging down from the skies. The American fleet was within range of the home islands and it was soon shown, through well-photographed newsreels and film released by the services, that the Japanese Air Force had not been wiped out.

The names of ships began to be known, the ships that had died off Okinawa: the destroyers *Bush* and *Calhoun* and *Mannert L. Abele*. The carriers were favorite targets for the Japanese youths who wanted only to take Yankees with them as they blossomed into flame and entered paradise. And the battleships were also hit. *New Mexico*, *Maryland*, *Tennessee*; the *Bunker Hill*, *Enterprise*, *Intrepid*, *HMS Victorious*. A man with Mark Fillmore's compulsion to keep score would, in future years, add it up: 36 ships sunk and 368 damaged, 763 Allied aircraft down. And on the shore, as the Marines and the dogfaces blasted and carved and dug their way through another fucking island, the Tenth Army would suffer more casualties than at Iwo: 7600 dead on the island, 12,500 in the air and on the sea.

Okinawa was Iwo magnified by multiple horror, although the cost per square mile was not as high. Okinawa ground on and on through V-E Day, with Tinian erupting in celebration that lasted only until the next B-29 mission went off, to be awaited nervously. Okinawa went on through the shocking news that F.D.R. was dead at Warm Springs, Georgia, and that the fate of the nation was in the hands of a pipsqueak of an ex-senator from

Missouri or some place. Okinawa was endless, going into June, with Liz getting the occasional letter from Mark, letters that told her that he was on the island, with his beloved Marines. Okinawa was the biggest fucking waterborne invasion of the Pacific war and more U.S. ships died there than at Pearl Harbor and over one hundred thousand Japs died, civilians leaping into the sea rather than be captured by the barbaric Americans who made ashtrays of Jap skulls. And as Okinawa went on and into June and demonstrated what could be expected on a grander scale when the Americans landed on a home island, Liz went about her business, thinking about vine-covered cottages and worrying about Clay and Vivia.

Vivia was going home. Art Damling and the others had had enough, wanted a respite from one-night stands thousands of miles apart. They were willing to come back later. They were patient with Vivia, who didn't want to go, but they were insistent. She wrote that she'd be back as soon as she could regroup the troupe or get on with another one. "I want to be there to kiss him when he comes back from each mission," she wrote Liz in a brief note.

Mark's true love was the Marines, but on Okinawa he spent some time with the three infantry divisions who shared the dubious honor of trying to wrest from the Japs a piece of ground that they considered a sacred part of the Japanese homeland. Mark wrote of places called Sugar Loaf, Kunishi Ridge, Shuri Castle, and Liz sometimes saw his releases before the homefront newspapers did, for the service newspapers, such as *Stars and Stripes*, had long recognized Mark as the spokesman for the Pacific war.

And then Okinawa was all over, the high command on Okinawa announcing "all organized resistance has ceased." Soon he would be back and she hoped, prayed, wanted to believe he was right in thinking that Okinawa would be the last island. But the B-29's continued to fly and the war went on.

She found the busy round of administrative duties to be healing. She involved herself in the smallest details, was determined to make her hospital the best in the Pacific, was able to submerge herself in her work so that the days passed. And suddenly there was the announcement that it was over on Okinawa, and she estimated it

would take him no more than a couple of days to get back to her. So when a nurse knocked on her door and said, "Someone to see you, Commander," she put down her work happily, a glad smile forming, feeling Mark's presence. She was wrong, but it was still shaping up to be a happy occasion, for as the nurse stepped back from the open door, a silly little furry face peered around the sill, round eyes rolling in their glass sockets, and following that face was another familiar one.

"Marcie," Liz gasped, running around the desk. She knew that Marcie had been back on a hospital ship for the past few months and she now figured that Marcie had been at Okinawa.

"Oh, Liz, Liz," Marcie said, her brief smile fading as she embraced Liz and pushed the monkey, Douglas, into her arms. "Douglas has come home."

"Nice to see you, you little monster," Liz said happily. She kissed Marcie on the cheek. "You too, girl."

"Liz, let's sit down," Marcie said, her face solemn.

"Sure. Tired? God, I know. Rough as usual, I guess."

"Rough," she said. "Sit down, honey."

"Hey, you're the one who's tired."

"Just sit down, Liz. Okay?"

And there began in Liz a sickness, a haunting, hurting, black dread. Who? Who was it? She went behind her desk. She had the silly monkey in her arms. Another dead friend. Names ran through her mind.

"Liz, a lot of people—" Marcie paused.

"Who?" Liz asked, her voice low and breathy.

"I want you to know, honey, how many people thought of you. They're holding up the announcement. They notified the next of kin, but orders came down all the way from the top and someone told the general about it and about Douglas and he knew already, everybody knows about Douglas—"

"Marcie, damnit."

"Well, honey, there's no easy way. And, goddamnit, it happened at the very, very last. It wasn't even a Jap soldier. He was up on the cliffs where the women and children threw themselves into the sea—"

"He?" No, no, oh, God, no.

"It was a young girl, dying. A marine tried to grab him, because they'd booby-trapped bodies and dying civilians all over that end of the island—"

"Mark?" It was not her voice.

"Yes," Marcie said, rising to come and put her arms around Liz.

Her first reaction was of disbelief, then an interior scream. "It is not fair. It is not fair." She'd just found him, just begun to love him. And then the cold, black realization that she was not special, that she was not exempt from the war.

She clutched Douglas to her and began to rock, a mother holding a child, as if she could get some comfort from the well-handled stuffed toy with his ever-lengthening name tag.

"They're sure?" she asked.

"Men saw it," Marcie said. "There was a huge explosion."

"The b—b—" She couldn't say "body," not in connection with Mark. "Where is he?"

"Not now," Marcie said. "Let's not talk about it now."

"I want to know."

"Men close to him were killed," Marcie said. "I don't have to tell you what that sort of explosion can do, Liz."

"Oh, goddamn," she said.

"They identified him from the serial number assigned him by the Marines."

And she could imagine. She'd talked with men who'd had the horrible job of trying to identify dismembered, completely obliterated bodies.

"Are you sure you want to hear it?"

"Yes."

"His foot. They took his serial number from inside the tongue of his boot."

"Ah, ah, ah." She was gasping, gagging. She tried to control herself and into her mind came a melancholy picture. She was alone, late at night, in a small apartment. Then a huge guilt, for she was thinking of herself and it was Mark who had died on the war's last island.

On another island, which had not felt the blast of bombs or war since 1942, Cicily Smith was driving home on a pleasant spring day. She'd spent the night in the city after a day's desultory shopping, picking among the scant supply of towels and linens in the stores, being a good Smith woman and looking ahead, working on out-

fitting a home, wherever it would be, for herself and Mark. The top was down and a Honolulu station was playing Johnny Mercer's latest hit, that fine, friendly, funny voice advising one and all to accentuate the positive and don't mess with Mr. Inbetween. She was driving slowly, letting her hair feel the wind, humming along with the catchy melody. There was little traffic on the road. It was a lovely day, the temperature just right for a swim in the pool when she arrived home.

Okinawa had been declared secure and she had made a decision. She would not, under any circumstances, allow anyone, including Mark, to talk her into waiting until after the next one. Because of her father, Cicily was privy to some pretty good information, and the best guess anyone could make was that the two separate Pacific commands would be united under Douglas MacArthur for the assault on the home island. The roads were paved in blood, true, but they were paved, both prongs of the offensive having come together in the Ryukyu Islands. From Okinawa the islands stairstepped toward Kyūshū, southernmost of the large home islands. When men talked of assaulting Japan proper they spoke in hushed tones, and all seemed to agree that landing on Kyūshū, the obvious choice, would make Iwo and Okinawa seem like a practice runthrough for a Sunday school picnic. Men who knew estimated U.S. casualties in the hundreds of thousands. And time? Two years, three years. God only knew how long, and if the Japanese fought more and more tenaciously, as they seemed to be doing as the distance between the invasion site and Tokyo lessened, it could be, God help us, five years before the last fanatical resistance was overcome and the men could go home for good . . . those who were still alive.

But she wasn't thinking grim thoughts as she drove through a Hawaiian June, taking it easy, humming along with Mr. Mercer, trying to remember the clever lyrics. When the news came on she let her thoughts wander to her purchases, safely stowed in the trunk, and wondered if Mark would prefer starched or unstarched sheets. She liked hers ironed without starch. It gave them a soft, cozy feeling. The news was relatively unexciting as, according to the usual pattern, there was a summary of the war news. And then, still listening with only half an ear, she heard the name. "The well-known war corre-

spondent was known to many as the Marines' Ernie Pyle. He was killed by a Japanese booby trap a full day after the island of Okinawa was declared secure."

She shook her head, taking her foot off the accelerator so that the little car slowed and rolled to a halt, half on, half off the pavement.

"Praise for Mark Fillmore has come from the highest places. Said Major General Roy Geiger, Marine Commander of the Tenth Army on Okinawa, 'We Marines have lost a valued friend. He was with us from Guadalcanal on, through Tarawa and Saipan and Peleliu, at Iwo. God knows, every Marine will miss him.'"

"No," she said, matter-of-factly, speaking aloud. "It simply cannot be true. There is some mistake." Accentuate the positive.

They were still talking about Mark, repeating the fact of his Pulitzer.

"I will not accept this," Cicily said, putting the car in gear and moving forward. "It is not true and I will not have it."

Nor could she believe it when, arriving home, pale, her face drained, her mother met her with open arms and tearstained face.

"Before you say anything, I've heard," Cicily said.

"Oh, my poor child," her mother wailed.

"I have decided not to accept it," she said. "That's all there is to it. Now stop crying, Mother."

She went to her room, took out his letters, began with the first and, a little smile on her face, read them through to the last. Was there a change in tone in the last few letters? Did there creep into his usually matter-of-fact statements a bit of doubt? No, she was imagining it. A lot of men got bad feelings and not all of them who felt a bit uneasy about the next one, the next island, the next battle, had those fears realized. A man did not predict his death.

She was sitting on her bed, legs crossed under her, having changed to shorts and halter. She let her head lower, hair loose, falling around her face.

"No," she said, in a firm, flat voice. "No."

Smith women did not beat their breasts and cry to God "Why me?" Smith women sat quietly, while the tears came in spite of all resistance, quiet, sliding down the clear, lightly made-up face. And then she knew. She

would not accept it, but she knew. And since it was permissible for Smith women to weep for their dead—they'd had some practice in the past—she took advantage of that luxury and turned to throw herself down so that her pillow would muffle the sobs.

June in the balmy central Pacific. It was hot and wet. The days were meaningless and endless for Liz. Marcie had come and gone. There were new men in the hospital being treated and readied for transfer to the Hawaiian hospitals and for eventual shipment home. Many would go to the Mare Island hospital, where the navy fitted its broken and maimed with artificial appendages. Even the wounded were speculating about the next invasion, the length of the war. But Liz did not join in. Mark had been wrong. Okinawa was not the last island, for there would be terrible assaults on the home islands. The casualty lists from Tarawa, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, would, tragic as they had been, fade into memory before the new and ever more harsh flood. Japan had never known defeat. The Japanese would fight to a man, to the last woman and child. And it didn't even matter anymore. She was dulled to pain. She worked with a sour dullness inside her. Work, work. There was nothing else, nothing to look forward to, no hope, all her dreams ended now.

Mark's death was front-page news all over the world. His foot, still encased in the Marine issue boondocker, was buried in a well-marked grave along with many of the brave men whom he had loved. The Marines had lost one of their own, a special man, a man who had never been hesitant to take the brass to task, to stand up for the grunt in the front-line foxhole. They organized a special ceremony, interring Mark Fillmore's foot with full military honors. The blast of the honor guard's rifles, the sweetly sad playing of Taps, was recorded on newsreel film. There were tears in the eyes of the Marine chaplain who spoke the last service under glum, lowering, Oriental skies. Preparations were begun in Washington for awarding Mark Fillmore the highest medal available to a civilian.

Aside from the continuing rain of death over Japan from the silver Superforts, the war seemed to have gone into a break. Homefront newspapers continued to feature the horror stories from the German concentration camps, and to publish features about the continuing co-

operation among the Allies, now called the United Nations. Americans, sick of war, shocked by the high casualties of Iwo and Okinawa, wanted only one thing, to see it ended, to see the Japs humiliated as the Nazis had been. The war had been going on for over three years, and there were few American households that had not been hit directly or indirectly by a notice from the War Department. There would have been few votes, had a plebiscite been held, and had the emperor offered, in favor of a negotiated peace. Too many young Americans had died to allow the war to end in anything but total and unquestioned victory. Now there would be a shift of war materials and men from the ETO. Now the full might of the United States and its allies, exhausted as they were, would be focused on the Pacific. The shift was already being effected, for there had been British ships at Okinawa.

In the days immediately after the official announcement of the end of organized resistance on Okinawa, those who had been involved in the fight weren't thinking much about the next island or the end of the war. Those who had done the dirty work and lived were just too damned glad they were alive to think about much at all except a long sleep in a bed with clean sheets, a shave, a cold beer. And the hospital ships that were receiving the last of the casualties were still full.

Aboard a hospital LST, the men who had waded half a mile of rice paddy to attack the last fanatical Jap hold-outs on Kunishi ridge were being brought in. There was no respite. It was hectic, as usual, bloody, as usual, and the medical crew was exhausted, as usual. They paid no special attention to the tall, lanky man brought aboard unconscious, with blast burns. He came in more dead than alive, in spite of some inspired work in the field by a navy corpsman who had stopped the gushing of blood from the stump of a leg. His burns were not serious enough to be fatal of themselves, but he'd lost a great deal of blood. He arrived naked, wrapped in a GI blanket, his clothing blown off by the blast. He was not quite a reject case, had his turn on the operating table, his life flickering feebly as the ragged stump was smoothed and sealed, the flash burns becoming the main concern. He'd need to be sent to a burn center as quickly as possible. And when, after the operation, after receiving whole

blood in great quantities, he began to respond, he became a passenger aboard a big, four-motored navy hospital plane. There he was tended, still mostly comatose, unable to hear, eyes bandaged, by a navy flight nurse in jump suit and brogans, hair snooded. No one was much concerned by the absence of identification. Dead or alive, he still had his fingers and could be identified by his fingerprints.

Now and then, during the flight, the man was distantly aware. He could feel the plane's movement. He could not tell, through the drugs that made his pain bearable, how badly he was hurt. He knew a tiredness so total that even thought was an effort. Once he responded to the voice of the flight nurse.

"Ah," she said soothingly, "so you're in there, after all."

He tried to speak and made a croaking sound, tried to nod.

"Good, good," she said. "Now just cool it, take it easy. You're fine. You'll be in a comfortable hospital bed in the burn center in a few hours. You're fine, beat up a little, but fine."

He could remember. Snatches of memory came to him as he was carefully transferred to a litter and carried from the plane. He was in a place of high cliffs and rocks and greenery behind, and there were Marines around him and below the cliffs a sickening evidence of the fanaticism of the Japanese, hundreds of bodies smashed on the rocks, being washed back and forth by the surf. Men, soldiers, women, children. And his foot itched. He wanted more than anything in the world to reach down and scratch his toes. Ah. Sitting on a rock, left shoe off, digging at the rot the medical profession couldn't cure. As he was being moved, he felt soothing hands and the bite of a needle and sank down into a glorious sleep. And then he heard the small, mewling sound and saw, again, the small girl jammed between two rocks, a small, yellow, doll-like child of, perhaps, ten, her eyes pleading, pleading, her voice making that mewling, begging sound. Oh, Jesus. Oh, Christ. Moving, holding his boot, not taking time to put it back on, calling, "Corpsman." Hearing a shout from the Marine nearest him and reaching down to offer the comfort of a touch, to take the child from

the uncomfortable position between the two rocks and—"Corpsman," he croaked. "Corpsman."

He felt hands on his arm. "Just take it easy." A soft, female voice. "You're all right. The war's over, Marine. It's over for you and you're fine. Just relax."

When he saw a dim light he tried to open his eyes and they hurt like hell but he could see a smiling face under the cute little cap. "Liz?" he croaked.

"I'm Martie," the nurse said. "Nice to have you back with us."

"Where—?"

"Hawaii. How do you feel?"

"Unnnn."

"Can you speak a little? We don't have a name on your card."

"Fillmore."

"Fillmore?"

"Mark Fillmore."

"Are you sure?" She'd read the glowing obits. He was a legend and he was dead.

"Think—so," Mark said. "Think—so."

She ran from the ward. A doctor came back with her and, following them a few moments later, a navy ranking with a fingerprint kit. Mark was, once again, sleeping the sleep of the drugged.

When he awoke next Bessenger was there, a full bird colonel. He stood at the side of the bed looking down and said. "It's Fillmore."

"I knew—all along," Mark said.

"Mark, you bastard," Bessenger said, his voice belying the harsh words, "you've scared the shit out of all of us. The whole world thinks you're dead. We buried you on Okinawa."

"Don't feel—dead," Mark said, still not thinking clearly. It was hours before he remembered, before it sank in, before he got the thing organized in his mind. He had them bring Bessenger back. Bessenger was with headquarters in Hawaii and had the pull and the desire to arrange the rather difficult hookup all the way across the Pacific, making one admiral and two generals angry because their priorities were being overridden. He heard her voice.

"Lieutenant Commander Wilder speaking," she said,

and he felt a warm surge of emotion, heard the dullness in her voice even over the crackling, static-ridden link.

"Liz, don't faint," he said, hearing the sharp intake of breath from her end. "It's me."

At first she thought someone was playing a terrible joke on her, but his voice was so clear, so familiar, hoarse and weakened though it was.

"Mark, Mark, Mark," she whispered.

"Liz, are you there?"

"Oh, God, Mark," she cried through happy, hysterical tears.

"To borrow a phrase from old Mark Twain, my namesake," he said, "the reports of my demise have been greatly exaggerated."

"Where are you? Where are you?"

"Hawaii. Burn center. Feel weak, Liz."

"All right, darling, don't talk any more. Just you hang on. I'll be there as soon as—oh, God, I don't know—as soon as I can. Hang on, darling, wait for me."

"Won't—die—now," he said.

And the voice of Bessenger. "He's fine, Commander Wilder. Burned a bit, not bad. They tell me his face will not be scarred. Eyes all right. Few holes in his hide here and there and. . . ."

"Yes?" she asked.

"He's lost a foot."

But not even that could diminish her happiness. She thanked Bessenger, was assured that Mark Fillmore would get the best treatment the navy could offer. And then she was on the telephone, trying to reach the Senior Medical Officer.

"Commander," she was told, "I understand your concern, but would your presence there help? He's getting the best care the United States can provide. In a few days, after we finish with the Okinawa casualties. . . ."

Yes. She could wait. She was alive again, resurrected along with Mark. A few days would not matter. There was even a blessing in disguise. He would not be on the next island. His war was over and in that respect he was lucky, for he would not be among the men who would die as the landing craft closed on sacred Japanese soil. Seemed damned silly, but she was almost thankful that he'd been wounded, lost a foot, and then she kicked her-

self mentally. She had no right to think that way. But, oh, God, he was alive! And she'd soon be with him.

He did not lack for care. The word was out, although there was no need for it, to take damned good care of Mark Fillmore. Not that any man was slighted, but nurses had favorites, fell half in love with a newly mutilated man in each new batch, sometimes picked one seriously wounded man to pamper, do the little extra things for. Then, when Mark's miraculous return from the dead made even bigger news than his death had, Cicily Smith had to hear it secondhand, from her mother who had heard it on a news broadcast. She broke speed records getting to the hospital and bullied her way in, using her father's rank shamelessly.

He felt a warm-soft pressure on his hand, swam up out of a morphine dream to feel *her* hand on his, whispered her name: "Liz."

Cicily felt a small stab of pain, but that was easily explained. He was sedated, and he was horribly hurt. He was merely going back in his memory.

"Liz?"

Eyes opening, lashes singed away, no eyebrows, burns on his face bandaged to leave him looking out like an owl from those bloodshot eyes.

"Boy, I've seen men do silly things to try to get out of a wedding," she said, smiling, moving her face down so that he could see, seeing his eyes widen. And then he said, "Ouch," for he had tried to smile. "But you lost, buster. There's still enough of you to carry to the altar."

But he had told her. Hadn't he? No, hell. "Hi, kid," he said. "Hi, Cicily."

"I shall speak with my father," she said sternly, "and tell him the navy has no business sending damaged merchandise back to me."

"Hi, Cicily," he said, and the heaviness was there again.

They had a conference about her, for she refused to leave. A doctor, knowing Cicily's admiral father, having met Cicily, knew that she was made of stern stuff. "I think she'll be the best medicine we can give him."

And now the dark, terrible days began, when the true shock of the burns began trying to tell Mark's body to take the final rest, to give up fighting the pain that burned now through sedatives. And she was there.

"You should have been a nurse," one of the nurses told her.

"We Smith women have always nursed our men," she said. She was so cheerful, so pretty, so willing. She emptied Mark's bedpan, kept an eye on the I.V., left side only for a few hours' sleep at odd intervals. They'd given her a bed in the nurses' quarters. Infection was the greatest danger. He was so weakened.

He rolled his head in delirium, calling, "Liz, oh, Liz." It pained her, but once again she told herself that he was merely going back into the early days of his memory when he'd lived next door to Liz. She had met the enemy head on and had won, for he loved her, not Liz Wilder. There was no doubt in her mind. She watched, wide-eyed as a doctor removed the bandages from his face. She expected the worst, disfigurement, ugliness, and saw only surface scabs.

"Ah," the doctor said. "I doubt if we'll have to do too much grafting. Maybe none."

Each day he was growing stronger. "Hell," the doctor told her. "He's a Marine."

Well, she guessed he was a Marine at heart. And when he opened his eyes and said, "Hi, kid," she smiled and held his hand. "Cicily?"

"Who else, dummy?"

"Hi, Cicily."

And as his mind cleared, as the drugs were reduced and he began to realize what had happened, he remembered that he was in one helluva fine fix.

"You're lucky to have a girl like that," the doctor told him, with Cicily out of the room. "She's been here for days, hour after hour. She's been a great help to us. You're a lucky bastard, Mark."

"Yes," he said.

Days. He could see the strain of it in the dark smudges under the eyes, the suntanned, clear skin there discolored by tiredness. "Listen, go home and get some sleep."

"Not a chance. You'd run off to another island."

How in the hell could he tell her? He could remember vaguely the bad time when he'd awakened for a moment and seen a face there and it had been her face.

"Yes, darling?"

"Nothing."

"Just rest," she told him.

She went home and got some more clothing and was back. He was alert, fully aware, hurting but sure now that he was going to live.

"God," he said, "I don't want to complain, but when are they going to let me move?" He'd been in the same position for years, it seemed, and he ached all over. And his damned foot itched. He could see only the sterile bandages and the tentlike thing that covered his body from the chest down.

"Soon, I think," she said. "Shut up and drink your beer." Beer was on his daily menu. Liquids were important to a burn victim. He drank. The foot set up a hellacious itching and he forgot, strained himself trying to reach, moaned in spite of himself.

"What is it?" she asked, leaning over, concern on her face.

"Nothing."

"It is. What do you want?"

"It's the damned foot."

For a moment she had a stricken expression. He didn't catch it. "The foot?"

"It itches like hell."

"I'll scratch it."

"No."

"Sure," she said, moving, then, ah, heaven, she was rubbing between his itching toes and saying, "Mark Fillmore, I know this much about it. I know that all men are told to change socks daily, to wash their feet. Shameful for you to let yours go this way."

"Nag, nag, nag," he said playfully. Easy to fall into that comfortable relationship with her. And then he remembered. This lovely, loving girl had no idea that he did not love her.

"That's enough," he said.

She washed his toes carefully. "I'm going to get something from the doctor."

"The only thing that'll cure it is to cut it off."

She made a small sound, thinking how brave he was to joke about it like that.

He was well enough to go back on the table, to have a couple of small pieces of shrapnel removed. Afterward he was sick from the anesthetic and it was Cicily who held the barf bag for him and mopped his face and brow with a cool cloth. He was still half out of it, but he was not

tented and covered. His foot was itching and he raised his head to look down in complete disgust, for the goo she'd gotten from the doctor didn't seem to do any good. Something was very strange down there. The sheet, gleaming white, tented upward into only one point. Groggy, he shook his head and looked at it again.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Where's what, darling?" Cicily asked.

"The foot, damnit. Where's my foot?"

"I was waiting to talk about that," she said, "until you were ready." She smiled. "You'll appreciate the irony, dear. They buried it with full military honors on Okinawa when they thought you were dead." She laughed. "I wonder if they'll have to disinter it now that you're alive?"

But he was making a strange sound deep in his throat as if he were going to vomit again. Something was wrong. She reached for his hand and he squeezed hers painfully.

"I want it," he said, still half groggy. "Want my foot." And then he was weeping.

"You didn't know?" she asked, stunned. Oh, God, what had she done? To joke with him when he hadn't even known. . . . "Mark, Mark, hush now. Be quiet. It's only a foot." Rattling on as if she didn't have good sense, but hurting for him as he wept, his chest heaving with sobs. "Other men have lost more, Mark. They're really very good with this sort of thing. A foot's easy. They'll make you one. It'll be just like new and—"

He was yelling hoarsely, back on Okinawa, feeling the instant of pain, the blinding whiteness.

When he came around again, she was wiping his forehead and a doctor was taking his pulse. She'd been crying, her makeup smudged. She was so dear, so vulnerable, and he would *have* to tell her soon. "All right now?" she asked.

"He's fine," the doctor said. "No one had told you about your foot, Mark?"

"No," he said. "No one."

"Damned shame. But we're doing wonders with artificial limbs now. A foot is nothing."

"Sure," he said, feeling a burning shame. He'd made her weep. She'd stayed with him through exhaustion and beyond and he'd made her weep. And then he'd wept and a grown man doesn't cry, even when he looks down, expecting to see the familiar twin mound of feet under a sheet, and sees only one peak.

"Look, Cicily," he said, trying his damned best to grin, making a sort of smirk that hurt his scabbed face, "the reason I was crying was because they got the good one. Damnit, if they had to have a foot, why didn't they take the one with the jungle rot?"

"It was damned inconsiderate of them," she said, beaming. He was all right now. "Just think, you'll never have to dance with a girl you don't want to dance with again. You can just say, 'Sorry, I left my right foot on Okinawa.'"

"I'll dance with them, because I won't be able to feel it when I step on their toes with my artificial foot," he said. "Punishment enough."

"I'll wear steeltoed sandals," she said.

So how do you tell a girl who has nursed you and wept for you that you don't love her? Especially after you've promised to marry her? And how can you keep from loving a woman who devotes herself to you hour after hour, day after day?

As most men do, he hated hospital rooms. And, as most men do, he allowed himself the indulgence of reverting, just a bit, to childhood, to being pampered by the doting woman in his life, allowed himself the occasional little groan when his healing body pained him, felt sorry for himself as the preliminary grafting began. She seemed always to be washing his foot, then applying some new thing she'd found. And, wonder of wonders, the itching was better, the lesions closing a bit.

So the easiest thing was to accept her presence. She was, indeed, a comfort. She had rented a room close to the hospital and was no longer sleeping in the nurses' quarters. But she was there for breakfast, often joining him, for her sunny disposition had endeared her to the staff and orderlies sneaked meals to her so that she could eat in his room, holding a tray across her lap. Mark was now able to lie in a propped-up position some of the time, the bed cranked up about halfway.

He would sleep, then awaken to find her, reading or dozing in her chair. "Cicily," he said, "it's above and beyond for you to be here every daylight hour." He had always hated visiting in hospital rooms. There was nothing more tiring, more debilitating, than sitting around a sick room.

"Trying to get rid of me?" she asked.

The words formed. Kinder, now, to say, "Yes, as a matter of fact. Cicily, it is time for you to go. I'm grateful, and I should have spoken sooner." Instead, coward that he was, selfish as he was, not wanting to be alone, taking a genuine pleasure in seeing her smile, in the feeling of security and love that he got when, waking from a sleep, he found she was there, he said, "You know better than that."

"Because one miracle has already happened," she said, quite seriously. "God brought you back from the dead for me and I'm not going to let you out of my sight. He's done his part, now it's up to me to take care of you for the rest of your life."

Jesus H. Christ.

"When I thought you were dead I was dead too, Mark. Oh, I was moving and breathing. I sat on my bed and read through your letters and they were so alive that I knew, somehow, that it couldn't be true." She laughed. "You might think I'm lying when I say it, but I never believed it. Not deep down inside. My rational mind told me you were dead, but my heart wouldn't take that irrefutable fact as truth. And my heart was right, wasn't it, me boy?"

"Cicily—" Again, he could not say it and there was a pain in him worse than those pains that had recently racked his body. He was caught in an impossible situation. Why hadn't he told her before Okinawa? It would have hurt her, but there is a natural pride in a woman that rebounds after the simple heartbreak of being spurned. He remembered one of Vivian's favorite quotes. "Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Cicily would have been hurt, then angry. And then she'd have been spared the agony of thinking that the man she loved was dead. But he'd been a coward then and he was a coward now. Now the hurt would be multiplied. She said she'd been gifted with a miracle, and to take that miracle away from her would be the ultimate cruelty.

But what about Liz?

Liz too had thought him dead, had known agony. But Liz was so strong. Oh, shit, where was this kind of thinking taking him?

Let's lay it out and look at it, Mark, he told himself. For some reason entirely beyond your understanding, you have two fine and beautiful women in love with you. This,

in itself, is most remarkable, for you're not much. You've got flat feet—correction, a flat foot. You've never been the answer to every maiden's prayer and now you've got burn scabs over a good portion of your scrawny body and you're going to be a cripple and have some scars and already, although you don't admit it to yourself, the hair at your crown is beginning to come off on the comb. So, in spite of all this, you have these two knockouts in love with you. It would be great if you could keep both of them, but you can't, so you're going to have to pull up your jock, square your shoulders, and tell one of them that great, big, handsome Mark Fillmore has the arrogance to reject her. And you know it's Liz you want. It's always been Liz, but, oh, Jesus, how beautiful this sweet little auburn-haired girl is, this Smith woman with her lively chatter and her heart as big as the *Missouri*.

So you just lie there, feeling sorry for yourself, because you got hit a bit and you're hurting and you'll be hurting for a long time. If you weren't burned they'd have you walking now and be putting the artificial foot on over the healing stump and you'd be hurting like hell trying to walk on it. It'll be even worse when you're able to travel and they send you over to Mare Island and fit a thing over a stump that will be tender as a boil. You take advantage of your hurts to tell yourself you're in no condition to bear hurting this sweet Smith woman. And, as the days go by, and you're in deeper and deeper. How are you ever going to do it?

And then she sweeps into the room on a bright July morning and you're feeling chipper in spite of skin grafts and assorted other shit and she's dressed in the most fantastic dress you've ever seen, a vision out of one of the new technicolor movies. She's carrying flowers, which she arranges on the table by the side of the bed, and she's got a bottle of damned good booze. She mixes you one and it's like heaven, that first real drink.

"What's the special occasion?" She was in a celebrating mood.

"Today is the day," she said brightly, perching herself on the side of the bed.

"What day?"

"It is my considered opinion," she said, "that your face is now in good enough condition that it won't be too painful if I kiss on you a little bit."

The grin stretched his cheek but the ache from the graft there wasn't bad at all.

She approached the task with the same efficiency she had applied to nursing him through the bad days. She helped him move over a little. Physical therapists had been working with him, not letting him do too much moving, but moving his limbs and massaging them, and he was a little better able to move without pain, so he lifted himself over and made some room. She lay on one elbow and smiled down at him.

"All right, big boy," she said, doing a not very good imitation of Lauren, "get ready to be kissed silly."

"Idiot"—he grinned—"a nurse will walk in and toss you out on your ear for molesting a patient."

"We Smith women plan our campaigns in advance," she said. "The result of years of living with military men. My friend Mary is on duty. She will keep everyone out for thirty minutes."

Her lips touched so softly at first that he scarcely felt them. "Hurt?"

"The pain is unbearable," he said, pushing his face back for more and then those soft, wet lips were caressing his and the kiss was so sweet, so gentle. And then she was breathing and pushing herself up against him, using her tongue to explore the inside of his mouth, and for the first time in a long, long while he felt genuinely alive.

When she pulled away she was flushed and breathing jerkily. "Sir," she said, "your thirty minutes are up. Now I must move along to the next patient."

"Over my dead body," he said.

"Ah, got to you, huh?" she teased.

He didn't answer, for he felt a surge of guilt. She had. She had indeed gotten to him. For a long time he had not thought of Liz at all.

"Now, there is something else special about this day," she said, rising, straightening her dress. "I've talked with the doctors. You'll be moved out in just a few days, on the first hospital ship heading for San Francisco, as a matter of fact. They won't let me go on the hospital ship with you, so I'll fly on over, find a place to stay near Mare Island, in Martinez if possible. They say it's pretty hard, so maybe I'll have to go across the bay into Crockett. But I'll be there when you get there. I'll be at the hospital every day. I've got letters from the doctors here stating

that I'm a responsible girl and that, incidentally, my father is an admiral and the admiral will be quite upset if I'm not allowed to be with you as much as possible."

"Cicily—" One last chance.

"Mother's going to be disappointed," she went on. "She did so want to have the wedding here, but you'll be given leave from the hospital soon after they fit you with a foot and we'll be married there. Then"—she grinned with a leer—"we can play house on the days when you are able to leave the hospital. After all, I deserve something, don't I?"

"You do," he said. "You deserve more than I can give you, Cicily."

"Well," she teased, "sometimes we Smith women have to settle for what we can get."

He had wondered how the hell he had ever survived the blast on Okinawa, and as he thought about this dilemma he wondered if it wouldn't have been easier if he'd been killed.

"I imagine we'll have to rough it a little," she said. "After all, there's a war on, but I'll find something, and I'll do my best to make it livable. We'll be together, and that's the most important thing. I can't bear the thought of being away from you. Just the thought of being separated while you're being sent over on the ship makes me feel suicidal."

She sat on the side of his bed again, and for a moment he wanted her to start the kissing again.

"There is no way I can tell you, Mark Fillmore, how much I love you. I guess the best way to say it is that when you were dead, I was dead." She'd said something like that before. "I couldn't have gone into a convent, because we're not Catholic, we Smiths, and I couldn't have dedicated myself to serving science or some such, because I have one talent and one talent only. I was meant to be a wife, a mother, your woman, to take care of you and feed you and keep your clothing neat and cure that damned jungle rot between your toes and that's all I ask." She frowned comically. "Okay, so it's not much, but we Smith women know—"

"—what we want," Mark finished.

So the stage was set for good old Liz. Good old solid-minded Liz. Good old strong Liz. He'd been boxed in by the most loving, the most vulnerable, the most admirable

girl he'd ever known. There was no way on God's earth that he could hurt her. There was no way on God's earth that he could willingly hurt Liz, but this was not always God's earth, as witness the war. If that were the will of God, it certainly diminished that character in Mark's mind.

He hurt so badly inside when, one day, he looked up and she was there, crisp and clean in her blues, lieutenant commander insignia testifying to the fact that she was one helluva girl. One of the doctors had accompanied her down the hallway and though she wanted to be alone with Mark she couldn't be rude.

"So here's our prize patient," the doctor said. "He's doing very well, Liz. We're proud of him."

"We all are," she said, her smile glowing. "Hi, Mark."

"The most beautiful nurse in the navy," he said, meaning it, almost not believing how good she looked. She bent and kissed him lightly on the lips, but the pressure of her hands on his shoulders told him that she was feeling more than just a peck on the lips, and the goddamned insensitive doctor, was happily chattering away about all the things he'd done to Mark's body to patch it back together, asking questions about people he and Liz had known on the *Solicitude* and about the hospital on Tinian. He stayed for ten or fifteen minutes before he glanced at his watch and apologized for having to leave.

"God," she said, moving toward his bed. "I thought he'd never leave."

He knew what he had to do. When she kissed him he put his lips in neutral, fought his urge to clasp her to him. She pulled back, looking at him questioningly.

"It still hurts a little, the face."

"Oh, sorry," she said, but he could see she was puzzled, if not a bit hurt. He steeled himself.

"You just made it under the wire," he said. "They're shipping me out to Mare Island soon."

"They told me," she said. "I—"

He broke in. "They've taken damned good care of me. And Cicily has been a jewel. She was here when I first came to and she's been here every minute since." He paused, looking at her face, which had gone rigid.

"And how is Cicily?" she asked, somewhat coldly.

"It hit her pretty hard, Liz," he said seriously. "She's

not like you and me. We're tough. She's always had things her way. I think it almost did her in."

And Liz was thinking about how she'd felt when she heard he was dead.

"You can stay for a while, can't you?" he asked. "An hour or so? We've got a lot to talk about."

"An hour?" she asked. She'd come prepared, armed with her accumulated leave time, to accompany him back to the States. But there was something about him, a stiffness, a formality.

"I guess you'll be going back to Tinian," he said.

"All right, Mark," she said, pulling up the chair and sitting close to the bed. "What is it? What's eating you?"

He looked away. He had to force himself. It was the only way. Of the two Liz was more capable of surviving. And, Jesus, what a conceited way to think of it. It was incredible to him that he had the power to hurt such a woman. She was mature, competent, more than competent, in her field. She'd risen to a rank held by only a very few women in a man's world. There flashed into his mind a sign he'd given her once, between islands. It had been run off on a mimeograph machine by some WAC in Hawaii. In big, old English script it read:

**A WOMAN HAS TO DO TWICE AS MUCH AS
A MAN TO BE CONSIDERED HALF AS GOOD.
FORTUNATELY, IT ISN'T DIFFICULT.**

Liz was not only a fine woman, she was a fine human being. She'd stood the most severe tests. Surely losing a one-footed, banged-up war correspondent would be less damaging to her than to the more fragile Cicily. What he wanted didn't really matter. There are times when a man must cease considering his own wants and recognize that he exists in a world of correlations with others. In order to live with himself, a man must, at times, give up what he wants.

"Girl next door," he said, not looking at her. "I've been damned unfair to you."

"No," she said.

"Yes, I have. We had a great relationship. I fouled it up by trying to make it a man-woman thing."

She was silent. She felt a return of the same desolation she'd known when Marcie told her he was dead. "I forced myself on you. I tried to make a sweet, mutual admiration society into a sexual union. I can excuse my-

self only by reminding myself that we came together during emotional times. That old phrase, there's a war on. We use it in the damndest ways, don't we?"

"Mark, are you trying to say what I think you're trying to say?" she asked, controlling her voice with difficulty.

"Liz," he said, shaking inside, feeling cold, lost, desperate. "I'll always love you. I'll always be the big brother if you need one."

She was thinking of E.O., kneeling on the bloody deck at Tarawa, of Ethel Johnston sitting in her rocking chair in her quarters up at Dutch Harbor holding that silly monkey close to her breast and mourning, dry-eyed, the death of a young airman, of the hundreds who had crossed the operating tables on the *Solicitude*. Their lives had been terminated by the war and now Mark Fillmore was, though not ending hers, rendering it, for the second time in recent weeks, quite meaningless. Anger rose.

"Mark," she said, speaking quite calmly, "I can't believe you're telling me you're in love with a silly little civvy who calls you Marky-Warky."

"That's beneath you, Liz," he said.

"So what the hell am I supposed to say? Am I supposed to smile and say, Oh, well, he's just changed his mind—again?"

"I've had a lot of time to think it over."

"It's unfair. She's been with you. She was with you when you were hurting, when you were vulnerable. At least give me a chance."

"Come on, Liz. This old carcass isn't worth your concern."

"And what about Tinian? I seem to remember that we both got pretty emotional, and not about the war."

Well, it was going to be worse than he'd expected. A quick jab, a killing thrust, that would be, in the long run, more kind. "It wasn't the first time, for either of us," he said, looking at her.

Her reaction was, at first, very girlish. How could he know? Then the anger was back, the growing anger that had been fed for so long by the senselessness of war, by death and blood and mutilation. "I never figured you to be that kind of son-of-a-bitch."

"Liz, Liz, this is old Mark, remember? We're buddies, friends."

"With friends like that—" She said.

"Liz, I simply can't believe you're that hurt."

"No, of course not. I'm merely pretending. After all, we had our little fling in bed. What more can I expect?"

"My lifelong admiration for you, my offer of friendship. I don't want to lose you, Liz, please. But I can't—" He paused. He'd started to say that he couldn't bring himself to hurt Cicily, but that would have given it away. Best to keep her angry. That way, she'd come out of it. "Like you said, Liz. Remember? It was sort of incestuous, wasn't it? We gave each other a bit of emotional first aid, just old friends. Can you see that lasting, carrying us through a lifetime?" He shook his head. "This is the hardest thing I've ever done." That was the first true thing he'd said since she'd walked into the room. "But I'm going to marry Cicily. She's coming over to Mare Island. We'll be married when I'm able to get out of the hospital for a few days."

"Just like that, huh?" Inane words, belligerence she did not feel, her anger now only a protective covering for the awful deep hurt.

"Wish us the best, Liz?"

"Sure. Why not?" She rose. He had to will his arms not to reach out to her, had to bite his lip to keep from crying out to her. And as she stood there, not wanting to leave, but not knowing what else to do, the door burst open.

"Hi, I'm back," Cicily said breezily, then halted just inside the door, her eyes moving rapidly from Mark's cold face to the obviously stricken face of Liz. "Liz Wilder," she said. "Gee, it's nice to see you."

"I was just leaving," Liz said.

"But you've come so far," Cicily said.

"And I have to go back just as far," Liz said curtly.

Cicily looked from one to the other, feeling something in the air, something that disturbed her. There was a look of anger on Liz's face. Anger between these two old friends?

"Yeah, stick around for a while, Liz," Mark said.

She faced him. "There's a war on, don't you know that, Marky-Warky?"

It was a direct jab at her, but Cicily didn't know why. She stood there, not knowing what to say, wondering what she'd interrupted. And then Liz was moving past her, shoulders straight, with a film of tears? Tears?

"Mark," she asked, as the door slammed, "what's going on?"

"She had to leave," he said. "Had to get back."

"Well," she said, moving toward the bed, bending, "too bad. Up to a kiss?"

His lips were slack. She drew back, looked at him, tried again. Still there was no response. It was as if no one was at home in there and she had a little sinking feeling inside. "What is it, Mark?" she asked, sitting on the side of the bed.

"Nothing, nothing. Just having a bad day, I guess."

"Well, we'll fix that," she said. "Little drinky-winky for the wounded hero?"

"I am not a hero and I do not want a little drinky-winky," he snapped, before he could stop himself. Then, seeing the look on her face: "Hey, I'm fine. Where have you been?"

"Oh, laying it on thick, trying to get air reservations," she said. Something had gone on, but if he didn't want to tell her, well, okay. She was not the kind to deprive her man of all privacy.

"And?" he asked.

"All arranged. The snag is that the ship they expected has been hung up somewhere. I may have to leave before you do, darn it."

"Cicily, I want out of here. I have to get out of here."

"Isn't that strange? I've been thinking the same thing. In fact, I spoke to the doctor and he said there was no reason we couldn't move you up to the house for a while. He's arranging for a wheelchair and transportation. Sound good?"

"Like a parole from prison," he said.

And at the big house he was greeted by the admiral and Cicily's mother like returning royalty. A houseboy was assigned to him. He was not all that good with the wheelchair at first, and he weakened quickly. Then the man would help him crawl into a bed where he was babied by both Cicily and her mother. He should have been as happy as a pig in clover but instead, every move seemed to be a struggle, the sun was just a nuisance, Cicily's bubbly happiness a source of black guilt.

"I think it's just a natural reaction," Cicily's mother said, when Cicily spoke of his moroseness. "This is his first time out of the hospital. He's just beginning to realize

that he's crippled. He'll come out of it. If anyone can cheer him up, darling, you can."

And she tried. God knew, she tried. And, being a Smith woman, she plotted things to make him feel better and arrived, at last, at what she considered the ultimate cheerer-upper. She planned it so carefully. It was a Sunday and word had come that the hospital ship was steaming for Pearl Harbor, e.t.a. Tuesday, departure for the States on Thursday. She had, by pleading, threatening, begging, changed her reservation to three days after his departure, bumping an army colonel with the help of the admiral's influence. They had spent a portion of the afternoon on the lawn, Mark in his wheelchair, she flitting around trying to interest him in a drink, in food, in talk, but he seemed more interested in talking with her father about the war. Tired, he asked for dinner in bed and got it. And then, the house quiet, her parents asleep, she was prepared. She shivered with anticipation, scrubbing so thoroughly her skin was pink. No silly precautions. She wanted his child and the sooner the better. If it happened the first time, well, many first babies were born a month early.

The little gown was one she'd chosen for their honeymoon. It was a delicate little fluffy thing that showed the rounded mounds, the dark tips, a hint of auburn, vee. She was trembling as she walked the darkened hallway, stood outside his doorway for a moment before easing the door open. It was dark inside as she closed the door behind her and, smiling, knowing a sweet yearning, smiled as if she had a sweet and comforting secret.

He was restless, tossing on his bed. Ah, she'd soon stop that.

"In the rocks, in the rocks," he said, the words coming in a tense, low voice. "Watch it, Billy Gene."

She knew he had nightmares. She'd heard that many of them did. She'd heard him mumble in his sleep many times in the hospital and she'd talked with him about it afterward. Billy Gene. He was back on Tulagi, pinned down below the ridge. She was so damned proud of him. He'd seen more combat than most and he was so brave about it.

"I guess they'll fade away someday," he'd said about his nightmares.

"Hey, E.O.," he said, rolling his head. Her eyes were

adjusting to the faint moonlight and she could see him, the covers thrown back, sleeping in the hospital pajamas. "Oh, goddamn, E.O., not you. Not you."

And she was moving toward him to stop his nightmare with her lips, to show him her love. "Liz, Liz. Not E.O."

"Mark," she whispered, standing beside his bed.

She could see his face in the moonlight, twisted, pained. And then he began to make sobbing sounds and she started to reach out to touch him. "Liz, Liz," he whispered, his voice full of his weeping. "Forgive. Oh, God, Liz. Forgive."

"Mark." Her hand on his shoulder. He came awake with a start and tried to sit up. She held him with gentle pressure on his shoulders.

"It's me," she said.

"Cicily."

"Yes, darling." She sat on the bed, letting her hands run soothingly over his face, his chest. "You were dreaming again."

"Sorry. Did I wake you?"

"No. I came to work mischief on your manly anatomy," she said, bending, finding his lips. His kiss was almost impersonal. He pulled away.

"I'm okay now. Go on back to bed."

"No," she whispered, her body atremble. She pulled the covers away from his legs, lay beside him, put her arm around him. "After serious consideration, I've decided to seduce you before they ship you out." He didn't speak, but she felt a change in him, a stiffening. She took it for renewed interest, let her hands soothe his chest down to his stomach. "You like?"

"Not a good idea," he said.

"I think it is."

"Lots of things could happen. The ship could sink."

"Always the pessimist," she said, moving to lower her torso, breasts warm through the filmy gown, lips seeking his. "Relax and enjoy it, soldier." And for a long and glorious moment she was his, his arm coming up to hold her, his mouth covering hers. And then, dammit, she had to speak, to break the spell. She was feeling a delicious need, a sweet wanting, a glorious knowledge that soon she would be totally his.

"We Smith women are naturally passionate," she whispered, "even though we always save ourselves for our hus-

bands. I don't think it will hurt to cheat just a few days, do you?"

The magic was gone. In his dream he'd been back in *Solicitude* with E.O. lying dead on the deck and Liz in his arms and he'd known such a terrible pain, such a desperate wanting.

"No, not now, Cicily," he said, trying to push her away.

"We Smith women are not used to being rejected when we offer our all," she teased.

"Damn it, Cicily," he said harshly, hating himself, lost, knowing a total hopelessness, "not now."

She did not show her hurt. "Swell," she said in her teasing voice. "Boy, that puts me in my place."

"No, no," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just that we've waited this long—"

"That's sweet, but unnecessary. I've thought it out. If I get pregnant we'll just say the baby is a month or so premature."

"Ah, damn, Cicily."

"I want you," she whispered, embracing him again. "I want you so much. If you want me it's all right. It's all right."

Liz had told him that once. "If you want me, Mark."

"Of course I want you," he said, trying to make his voice light. "But you Smith women save yourselves for your husbands and who the hell am I to break tradition? Kiss me and go back to bed, Cicily. I'll make it up to you."

"You are cruel and hateful," she said. "Here I've convinced myself to be evil and you're so damned pure you won't let me." She kissed him lightly. "But it's sweet of you. I love you."

He did not respond. As she went back to her room, the trembling, sweet need was replaced by a mood she could not explain to herself, not at first, until she remembered her last words to him and the lack of response. Not once, since she'd first gone to him in the hospital, had Mark said, "I love you." Very, very strange, that.

She lay awake thinking about it. She knew he'd been on Tinian after Iwo Jima, and she knew that Liz Wilder had been stationed there. And there'd been that something or other in the air in the hospital room the day Liz came.

They wheeled him onto the terrace for breakfast and, although he seemed to be making an effort, there were

times when he would leave her, gaze off toward the sea. He had no appetite.

"My, such deep, deep thoughts," she said. "I don't have a penny, only a kiss."

"I was just thinking they're still out there, all the boats and ships and planes. All the men. I had a pretty good inside source tell me that it would be over soon, but I see no sign of it. They're thinking about the home islands now, picking out the good beaches. I'd like to go up to Maui, or over to Camp Tarawa. Just see them. And then I wonder if I could face them, knowing that most of them will get it when they hit a home-island beach."

"Mark, let's not talk about the war," she said. "It's over for us."

He waved a hand in negation, but did not contradict her.

"They've brought mail," she said. "Anything interesting in it?"

"I didn't look."

It was lying beside his plate, a letter from his mother, envelopes from the paper, a V-Mail letter. He picked it up. He opened the V-Mail letter first, hunched himself straighter in the chair, read with absorption.

"Who's it from?"

"A G.I. I met in New Guinea," he said. "It went all the way to the paper in San Francisco, then they read-dressed it to me here."

"A good friend?"

"I knew him for a few days. He was writing poems."

"My God, in New Guinea?"

"I guess war is not a good subject for poetry."

"I like Browning's *Incident in a French Camp*," she said.

"Ah, yes, the bravery, the glory. Why the hell is it that everyone sees glory in a dead soldier? Westerfield doesn't see glory because, unlike Browning, he was there to smell the rotted bodies half covered in mud. Listen, he's sent one of his latest."

He read the poem aloud, his voice neutral, the words unstressed, words about men dying, about the red blaze of war and shallow graves.

She shuddered.

"He's in the Philippines. If he lives through it he'll be one of many who hit the home-island beaches."

"Please, Mark; it makes you morose," she said. "Let's talk about something else."

"Good God," he said with heat, "isn't it enough to be morose about? Here's a sensitive, educated, gentle man, a poet. He's carrying a rifle and killing other men."

"Listen, is there anything you need before you go on board the ship?" she asked, trying to change the subject. And for a moment he was bitter, remembering that Liz was always willing to listen.

"Not really," he said. "Look, how about calling Juan and telling him to get my things ready? I'm nothing but a burden to you here. It's time I got back to the hospital."

What had she done wrong? What had she said wrong? Or was it merely the letter from the old friend? She decided not to push the issue, went off to do his bidding.

EIGHT

"BOB Hope?" Vivia asked, her voice breathless. "You'd better not be teasing me, Mr. Having."

She'd had only three days at home, and although she was eager to get back she was not reluctant to face a few more days of lying late in the sack, lazing around, fattening herself on her mother's cooking.

One of her first acts on arriving in San Francisco had been to start the lengthy process of getting Gloria May Swann on the telephone. It took some doing, for Gloria May lived in a dorm and summer school was in session and she never seemed to be in her room. Messages left with young, eager voices did not seem to get to Gloria May. But on the second night the telephone rang and there was Gloria May's precise, cultured voice saying, "Hello, I'd like to speak with Vivian, ah, with Vivia Wilder, please."

"Gloria May, is that you?"

"Yes, Vivia?"

"You are a rat, Gloria May, a dirty, stinking, Jap rat and you did it deliberately."

Although the words were delivered laughingly, Gloria May didn't know exactly what to say.

"Well, don't you have anything to say for yourself, you rat?"

"Vivian Ruth," she said, "I must confess I'm at a loss to understand what you're talking about."

"And you my future sister-in-law," Vivia teased.

"What?"

"And you deliberately didn't tell me that your brother is the most wonderful man in the world. It's all your fault that I couldn't have been in love with him for years."

"Really?" The reserve was gone, replaced by excitement. "Oh, really, Vivian Ruth?"

"Really and no shit," Vivia said. "God, he's beautiful. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, I tried to," Gloria May said.

"Well, we'll forgive you. If you're a good girl and make good grades and don't sass teacher and become a doctor we'll even let you be our personal physician."

"Oh, it is wonderful," Gloria May said. "Clay wrote to say he'd seen you in the islands, but he didn't tell me you two were—" She paused.

"Oh, don't be afraid to say it. He loves me. Yes, we're in love."

"Then I'll deliver your first baby free of charge, if you'll wait until I go through two more years of school, four years of med school, a year of internship—"

It didn't bother her. She didn't think about it. Her life with Clay could be complete without babies. If Clay wanted a baby they could adopt one.

They chatted for a few minutes and then the operator came on to tell Gloria May her time was up, to deposit more money, and Gloria May wailed that she had no more. "Call collect next time," Vivia yelled, not sure whether she was heard before Gloria May got cut off. She talked with Gloria May once more before the beautiful, exciting, unbelievable call from Mr. Having and then she was off and running, kissing her parents good-bye.

"You are big-time now, young lady," Mr. Having said. "He asked for you."

"But he's never seen me, never heard me sing."

"Look, he's been around as much as or more than anyone else in the U.S.O. Camp Shows. He's probably heard about you from the men themselves."

She felt all young and funny. Les Brown's big, brassy, saxy band was playing when she went into the hall and

there was Hope himself, looking just as he looked on the screen. She went up shyly, getting prepared to introduce herself. Les Brown was playing "It's Been a Long, Long Time." Hope saw her, waved and grinned.

"You have to be Vivian," he said.

She was surprised. "Yes, sir," she said.

"Hey, do I look like some kind of general?"

"Yes, Mr. Hope."

"It's Bob, honey, to anyone as pretty as you. But we'll have a chat later. Les has been waiting for you."

Short, smiling, the bandleader gave the cutoff beat to the band and came over to shake hands. "If you're half as good as Paul Welton says, I love you."

"I promise to be only a minor sensation," she said, feeling a little nervous.

"'Sentimental Journey' in what key? And it had better be the one we have the sheets on."

"Maestro," she said, giving him a little bow. Whee. Wow. Zowie. Oh, God, what a band. She hit it on the nose, trying *not* to sound like Doris Day. She didn't. She sounded like Vivian, big and throaty. Heeeeeeaven.

"Eeeeh," Brown said, face deadpan, when the band spiraled down into silence. "You'll do."

She thought it had been better than that.

He grinned. "Until we can get Jo Stafford," he said. "And then I'm not sure I'd trade."

Her smile seemed to warm his face and then the band was yelling out, "All right. Solid. Great."

She'd had a strange letter from Liz. It was all formal and didn't say much. It said that Mark was in the hospital in Honolulu and nothing else about him except that he was recovering. So when they landed at Pearl and had a little time she got a nice lieutenant to find out where Mark was.

He was reading a newspaper, hidden behind it. "Hey, guy," she called gaily, "are you hidden in there?"

He looked at her blankly for a moment, then smiled. He was so thin. He looked tired, dark circles, wrinkles on his face she had never imagined on Mark, but the smile helped, made his eyes come alive.

"I'll be darned," he said. "How beautiful are you going to *get*, Vivian?"

"If you have more of that I'll wait a few seconds to kiss you," she said. "Hi."

"You look wonderful."

"You look like you've been shot at," she said, leaning to smack him one under the eye.

"Don't say the rest." He chuckled. "I've heard it."

"Well, how the hell are you, except for being in one helluva mess? Aren't they feeding you?"

"You always tell it straight, don't you?" he asked. Damn, it was good to see her. And her friendly barbs made him want to laugh. He hadn't wanted to laugh in a long, long time.

"Well, I thought they were putting you back together, not starving you to death. Hey, you hear I'm with the Hope troupe?"

"Wow, big-time."

"Bet your sweet ass," she said. "They love me."

"I guess everyone does," he said. "I do."

"Yeah, me too, big brother," she said, squeezing him with a hug that made him wince, then perching herself on the side of his bed. "What the hell happened?"

"Oh, well."

"No modest shit."

"Vivian Ruth, you have just had in your mouth what I wouldn't have in my hand," he said without thinking. And it hit him. Liz used to tell her that. The look on his face was not lost on Vivia. "It was a boobytrap under a ten-year-old Japanese girl. She was dying."

"And old good-hearted Mark wanted to help. Jesus, won't you ever learn?"

"I'm learning. Slowly."

"Well, hey, listen, I'm on my way west. Tinian soon." The thought made her radiant.

"Ah, a certain young airman waits there I take it."

"Bet your sweet—" She grinned. "You met him. Isn't he wonderful?"

"Just ducky-wucky." He grinned back, remembering how they'd looked together, glowing like two intoxicated fireflies. "He's a lucky boy, Vivia."

"And any messages for a certain big sister of mine?" He didn't answer immediately. "Oh, tell her hi."

"And that's all?" She squirmed around and took his hand. "What's with you two? Last time I saw you you were shackled up together and Liz was talking about vine-covered cottages and babies after the war. You two have a fight?"

You could not accuse Vivia of walking delicately around a question. Not ever. "Vivia, I'm going to marry a girl. Her name is Cicily Smith."

"You have got to be shitting me," she said flatly. "Are you out of your everlovin' mind? You and Liz. That's it."

"It was it," he said.

"All right," she said. "Give. I won't leave, I won't give you a moment's peace. Where do you hurt the worst?"

"The graft on the leg, I guess," he said.

"I'll kick you right on it."

He tried to laugh. "Yes, I guess you would. Okay I fell in love, that's all."

"Goddamnit, Mark Fillmore, you've been in love with my sister all your life and she with you. What's the matter with you two?"

Vivia had a strong set of lungs. She'd never been able to inhale a cigarette and she'd developed her voice through years of singing. Her natural tone of conversation, in that distinctive, throaty voice, would probably have carried a good half-mile over a stormy sea. It carried well through the door where Cicily had just paused. As she entered the corridor leading to Mark's room, she'd met a nurse who knew her and the nurse had said, "Hi, Cicily. Your boy's got company."

"Oh?" she asked. "Who?"

"Girl named Wilder," the nurse said, moving past.

The name hit her hard and she almost turned away. Liz was supposed to be back on Tinian. But Smith women didn't turn away from trouble, even if a Smith woman's man had been acting strangely. She continued down the hall and heard Vivia say, "What's the matter with you two?"

She could not quite catch Mark's quiet reply and then Vivia was saying, "Am I right or am I right? You've been in love with Liz for years. Right?"

And Cicily had to do it, had to push the door open just an inch so she could hear his answer clearly.

It was, he thought, probably the last time he'd ever say it, to anyone. "You are right," he said.

"And you were in love with her on Tinian and she with you," Vivia said. "Right?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Vivia, things change. Cicily's been wonderful. She stayed with me night and day."

"She's a nurse?"

"No."

"Hell, a nurse, any nurse, would stay with a man night and day if he needed it. Liz certainly would have."

"You don't understand," he said.

"I sure as hell don't. You don't just turn it on and off, Mark. Not people like you and good old solid-minded Liz. Now, something happened. Hell, you two should be mature enough to work it out. If you can't, I will. Now you tell me."

"Vivia, I appreciate your concern. I know you're worried about Liz. But she looks on me as a brother, that's all."

"You were more than a brother on Tinian. What's with this Smith girl? She got one with zizz-wheels inside?"

"Come on, Vivia."

"All right. Look me dead in the eye and tell me you don't love my sister and I'll leave you to your little Cicily. Now you do it."

She could not resist. She pushed the door open a bit more so that she could see him. The beautiful blond girl was sitting on the side of the bed, her profile elegant, her face stern. Mark had difficulty looking at Vivia. When he did his face looked strained. "Vivia, I love Liz as a sister."

"Don't try to fink out. Say it."

He swallowed. Cicily held her breath. "I do not," he said, pausing to swallow, "love Liz Wilder."

But Vivia saw it, just as Cicily saw it, and Cicily felt something sink inside, felt the truth she had only guessed at before. For there had been quick tears in his eyes and his voice was choked and even as she closed the door, she heard the blond girl say, "Then why the tears, damnit?" and then Cicily was walking down the corridor, her head held high.

NINE

HARRY Truman had a high, thin speaking voice and when he tried to be emphatic he often sounded like a schoolboy whose voice was changing. F.D.R. had been dead for a little less than four months and even those who had asked "Harry who?" back in April when Truman took the oath of office were beginning to realize that the little man from Missouri was a scrapper. When he spoke, on August 6, 1945, the world ignored the high, thin voice and heard only the words, for he was speaking of that event which, in one searing instant, had changed the world forever.

"The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base."

The gleaming, silver monster took off from what had become the world's largest airfield, on an island bought with Marine blood. They called the thing in her belly "Little Boy."

"We have won the race of discovery against the Germans."

Few people in the world, outside of high military and scientific circles, had even been aware of that race. Hitler had discounted the possibility, taking funds away from the research early in the war. No one, not even the scientists involved, had known what would happen when the exotic materials inside an experimental atomic reactor were bombarded with atomic particles.

"We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young men."

Mark's poet friend, Hargis Westerfield, had been scheduled to hit the beaches of Kyūshū on November 1, 1945, with G Company, 163rd Infantry.

"We shall continue to use it until we have completely destroyed the Japanese ability to make war."

A Jap sub had narrowly missed waylaying the ship that had carried "Little Boy" to Tinian. One more bomb was being readied. After that there was no guaranteeing when the next would be finished.

Chaplain William Downey sent the *Enola Gay* off on her mission with a little prayer that, in effect, called upon sweet Jesus Christ to bless the men and their weapon. The bomb-bay doors opened shortly after nine A.M. on August 6. The bomb run lasted only four minutes. It was bombs away at nine fifteen. The death toll would always remain an estimate.

"I do not care if one hundred thousand Japs died," Liz Wilder said. "I hope that some of those who died were the ones who manufactured the grenade that killed E.O., or the *samurai* sword that was used to cut off the heads of the nine Marines who were left behind on Makin Island."

She was having lunch with Clay. He'd just received his third rocker.

"Well, I guess wars aren't fought by soldiers alone," Clay said. "We couldn't be fighting if men and women weren't working in war plants back home."

"Mark says the death toll of a home-island invasion would go into the hundreds of thousands," Liz said. "And, Clay, I've seen enough of them die. I hope the next one is right square on Tokyo."

"Wouldn't be any high command left to surrender," Clay said.

"Well, there's one good thing. With this new, whatever it is, this atom bomb, I guess you won't be flying any more missions."

"You don't know the air force, lady. We've got hardware. We've got the bombs. What the hell would you do with a million tons of bombs after the Japs surrender?"

"So you will be flying?"

"As your sweet-talking sister loves to say, you bet your sweet ass."

"Clay, be very, very careful."

"Repeat the above," he said with a grin. "No sweat, though. *Valiant Vivia*'s a good-luck ship. And her namesake puts a hex on the Japs. By the way, did you know she's on the way out here?"

"Really?"

"Little wench didn't write to you?"

"She never writes."

"She does to me," he said, smirking with mock superiority.

"You're built differently from me." Liz grinned.

"About the missions. I think they are mainly diversionary. I guess they'll be dropping a few more of those big ones and they don't want the Japs to be able to zero in on them. We'll have milk runs, mostly. We'll drop a few, but maybe on quiet targets."

Like the steel mills at Kōbe. "Jesus Christ," Bill Hensley said, when they saw the briefing maps.

"Yes, my son?" asked Clay. Kōbe. She was ringed by guns and covered by half a dozen air bases from which the Jap Zeroes rose like flies.

Hensley was a good pilot. He didn't try to pull rank. He believed that a good crew was a happy crew. He tried to make the crew of the *Valiant Vivia* feel like one large, all-male family. He couldn't carry a tune worth shit and when he sang "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder" over the plane's intercom while he was sitting, revving motors, waiting for his turn at takeoff in the predawn darkness, the crew always groaned.

"All right, kiddies, let's check 'em out," Hensley said. And they came in checking the equipment, waist, navigator, radio, tail. "Roger and effing wilco," Hensley sang, pouring power to the four engines and lifting *Valiant Vivia* off with a surge of wild elation that he always felt with that power under his hands. "Whose turn to serve the coffee?" he asked, taking his place off the wing of *Bouncing Betty* and falling back to cruising power. They made a long, long climb to cross the Jap coast way up where the morning skies froze and made the telltale contrails. Down there the ground was still wrapped in ground mist and maybe they wouldn't be able to see Kōbe except as a blank in the middle of a million fucking guns.

The 51's were high and low, pacing them, pilots swiveling their heads.

"I get the feeling we're not welcome," the co-pilot said, as flak appeared below and began to staircase up.

"Throttle jockeys are going to earn their pay," Clay called from the tail, for he could see the 51's behind peeling off, streaking to meet the Zeroes coming up, straining for altitude.

"I thought the fucking Jap Air Force was destroyed," Hensley said.

"Bogie, three o'clock high," said the starboard waist gunner in his business voice, which was a little strained.

"All yours, Ty," said Hensley, spotting the diving Jap,

feeling the plane sort of twist and leap a bit sideways as the waist guns started firing.

"Sheeeit," Ty said, "*Betty* got 'im."

The Zero had flashed over, burning, plunged down and away.

"Comin' at you, Pete," Clay yelled. And the port guns blasted and then he had his power turret moving and followed the Zero down and away, feeling almost sorry for the poor bastard. He'd hate like hell to have to fly one of those unarmored crates and face a 29's guns. More firepower than General Grant at Petersburg. But better that poor Jap son-of-a-bitch than he. He had business after the war.

"Call home and see if the Japs have surrendered," Ty said, as a P-51 blossomed, a Zero on his tail following suit as the wing man got him, all taking place very conveniently just below and away so that Ty had a good view.

You could see the ground now. "How long, Johnnie?" Hensley asked.

"Red Flight leader's started his run," the bombardier said. "Hold her steady, Freddy. Comin' up on the marker."

"Want the doors?"

"I'll tell you when, boy," the bombardier said. "Like maybe . . . ah . . . thirty seconds."

Red Flight's bombs were walking tracks of fire across the ground far below.

"These guys don't give up," the port waist gunner said, guns yammering.

"Doors," the bombardier said.

"Bomb-bay doors open," the co-pilot said, after hydraulics hissed and the plane slowed slightly with the additional drag.

"Steady, my boy."

"Come on," Hensley said. Flak reached up for them, a near concussion telling him that, big as she was, the *Valiant Vivian* was only thin aluminum after all.

"All right, all right. Easy. Easy. And whamo."

The plane lifting suddenly, relieved of weight, bombs tilting noses down, falling in a line and the formation beginning to wheel.

"Take this mother home," Clay sang into the intercom. "Your wish is my command," Hensley said.

"Oh, shit," Ty said. "More of 'em."

Three of them coming down from above front. "Yours, baby."

"Get him, Ty, get him."

"Oh, Christ."

The Zero took *Bouncing Betty* head on, a fiery flower of explosion, the big plane's nose gone, shattered, wreckage blowing away and the monster halting in midair for one instant before it seemed to swell and expand and break into huge pieces that went cartwheeling down.

"Chutes, anyone? Anyone see chutes?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Crazy. Those bastards are crazy."

"Here he comes, Bill. Watch the bastard."

"Bomb-bay doors closed?"

"Bet your sweet ass."

"Get that mother. Get that mother."

"Son-of-a-bitch's trying to ram us."

"Hang on, you guys," his voice calm, treating the monster as she was not meant to be treated, jerking her up, up, risking stall, but the Zero, a 51 on his tail, went under and he was about to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Jesus Christ."

Wham. She fell over on her nose, almost stalling. Answered, came level.

"Who got out?" Clay asked, his voice betraying him.

"Got us on the belly."

"Engineer, damage report."

"Hang on. I'm still trying to find my teeth."

"Belly. Forward belly."

"Rear belly, Bill. There ain't no forward belly."

"Bill," the co-pilot said. "Number two."

Number 2 was shaking. "Feather the bitch," Hensley ordered. "Musta hit the prop."

"Engineer, Bill. The forward belly turret is gone. We're sucking air."

"What else?" Hensley asked.

"Can't tell. How's she flying?"

"If the three engines hold we'll make Iwo."

"Clay, send Vivian a message. Tell her to kiss her fingers and rub her twat and keep those three mothers running."

"Come on, girl," Clay said.

"I think she'll hold together, Bill," the engineer re-

ported, after a long and nervous wait during which no one felt like wisecracking.

"Good old *Vivia*," Hensley said.

Behind them the fighters were disengaging, the P-51's with just enough fuel to make the fields on Iwo. Flak from the coastal guns was ineffective. They'd fallen behind the formation. A pair of 51's zoomed up, found the bomber frequency.

"Gonna make it, *Vivia*?" asked a pilot.

"Bet your sweet ass," said the radio man.

"We can stay with you until you're out of fighter range."

"Your name, address, and serial number and you get a fifth of the best Scotch," *Vivia* sent.

"Meet you in the officers' club on Iwo," said the 51.

"Show me the way to go home," sang Ty, his voice not yet recovered from the high, nervous squeak of business hours.

"Clay, you landed on Iwo a couple of times, right?"

"Roger on that."

"Runways okay?"

"Hell, it's duck soup now. First time I went down with the old *Dinah Might* we landed on dirt and the Japs were still shooting. They've got paved strips now, plenty long."

"I love you," said Hensley.

"Kiss a Marine," Clay said.

"Gaaa," said Hensley.

Radio, after a while, was in touch with Iwo. *Vivia* was punting along on three engines just as if she'd been made that way. Ty's voice was back down to normal, a rich baritone. Clay had come out of the tail and was in the waist brewing coffee.

"I seeeeeees the island," Hensley sang out. "Maybe I will kiss a fucking Marine."

"We got it," the radio man said. "It's all ours. Wind northerly and light."

"In from the south," Hensley said.

"One of these days you might make it and be a real pilot," the bombardier said.

"Gimme some wheels," Hensley said a little later, Suribachi off the port wing.

"Wheels you get," the co-pilot said.

"Damn."

"Don't say damn like that," Hensley said. "I have a low threshold of fright."

"Wheels you ain't got," the co-pilot said.

"You've got to be shitting me," Hensley said. "Engineer."

"I shit you not," the co-pilot said. "Hydraulics gone on systems one and four."

"Mother, mother," Hensley moaned, in imitation of a dying soldier in a vivid war picture they'd all seen together. "Tell Iwo we'll have to go around again."

And, a bit later. "Bill, it's shot. The whole landing hydraulic system is gone."

"Put 'em down by hand."

"You've got to be shitting me."

Silence. Clay had come forward and was looking out over Hensley's shoulder. Suribachi was standing out clear and ugly. He wasn't shook, not yet. "What's the story?" he asked.

Hensley turned off his mike. "No wheels."

"The water?" the co-pilot asked. He had not turned off his mike.

"Hey, you guys," Ty yelled, his business-hours voice squeaking. "I can't swim."

"How's the sea look?" Hensley asked.

Radio contacted Iwo. Choppy waves were running five to six feet high. "Jesus," Hensley said. He thought it over. It was the sort of thing he'd been trained for. He had three options. He turned on his mike. "All right, you guys, here's the poop from group. We got no wheels. That means one of three things. One, we try to ditch. Problem there is we got us some waves down there and if we hit one just right it would be like hitting a brick wall. Two, we all become paratroopers."

"Oooooo," someone moaned.

"Three, we loaf around up here and use up juice until the tanks are almost empty and then we belly in. Now you all have a shot at option number two. I'll take her in, nice and slow, and you can go out the bomb-bay doors. Just like stepping off a step."

"A couple of thousand feet high," someone said.

"Well, anyone want to jump?"

"Don't rush me," Ty said. "What about a belly landing, Bill? You ever do one?"

"Naw. I talked to a guy who did. Said it wasn't bad. Eighty-sixed a monster, but the crew walked off."

"Man," Ty said, "I'm afraid of heights. You gonna ride her down, Bill?"

"Nothing but."

"Then I'm with you."

"Clay?" Hensley asked.

Now he was shook. He'd had briefings on leaping from a B-29 and he didn't like the idea at all. First of all, the mother flew fast. Second, he might just be scared enough to forget to pull the cord. Hensley was a damned good pilot.

"I'll ride her down with you, Bill," he said. "Promise you'll do good."

"You've never seen good," Hensley said.

They could dump some of the fuel. It spewed out behind them in a potentially deadly stream. It took only a couple of hundred years to fly out the rest and then, Hensley's hands white with tension on the wheel, that hundred years didn't seem long enough and they all wished they could circle that ugly pork chop of an island for another hundred years, maybe just a few more minutes, just long enough, maybe, to try to remember a prayer or two, but the gas was low, just about right, a little reserve in case the first approach went wrong.

"Now remember, when I say to do it, we'll kill 'em. Feather the props. Got it?"

The co-pilot nodded.

"Clay, go strap yourself down somewhere. It'll be a short but rough ride."

"Roger," Clay said.

She came in on the western slope of Suribachi. Down below they could see the crash wagons lined up, men along the strip. Hensley loved that strip, long, long, and wide. He would have no control once she touched down and he prayed she'd slide true.

"Is everybody happy?" he called out.

"You have got to be shitting me," someone said.

"Tighten the old sphincters," he said. "Don't want my plane messed up. Five hundred and going down. Three hundred, two, one. Hang on to your jocks. Good luck, kiddies."

A Movietone Newsreel crew was on Iwo. The Japs had been asked to surrender before another atom bomb

was dropped and the world waited with its breath held. A far-seeing producer had ordered the crew to Iwo to be on hand for a quick trip to Japan after the surrender. A photographer was hanging around operations when word came that a wounded monster was going to make a belly landing, and he set up his camera about a quarter of a mile from the point the plane was expected to touch down, all loaded and ready. He got a shot of the 29 coming in past Suribachi. It'd show up very small on the film, but he had it. And then he zeroed in and was ready and the gleaming monster came down heavy into his viewfinder a hundred feet off at the extreme southern tip of the runway and eased downward. He had it and the camera was grinding. He saw the plane drop. It came down the last few feet real heavy and he expected it to bounce, but it didn't. Sparks flew from the paved strip, and she was down. It was like fireworks, the sparks flying, and he was cranking and panning as the plane screamed closer, the sound of the grating, eroding metal coming to his ears a split second after he saw the sparks. She was moving. God, she was moving. Be up to the commentator and the writers to find out how hot she came in. And she was down.

"On the ground," Bill Hensley yelled over the screaming of metal. "Sliding pretty. We're gonna make it, guys."

And, surely, they were slowing. Ty's high voice started the cheering.

Valiant Vivia screamed down the runway, shedding metal. She was being ground away. The rear turret was gone, but the gunner was strapped down, up in the waist with Clay. They felt her begin to slow, heard Ty start yelling happily, joined him, throats straining with relief as she slowed and slowed but was still traveling like a fucking express train on a flat stretch of track.

The Movietone cameraman heard the cheering too, not from inside the plane but from the men lined up in front of the hangars and operations. The pilot had done one helluva good job. The plane was looming larger and larger, slowing, and then a wing dipped, a prop dug, throwing huge cascades of sparks, breaking off and flying back and she seemed to sigh, to buckle, and she wheeled, and inside Ty's cheering became a high, piercing scream that ended as *Valiant Vivia's* wing folded and she slewed and that seemingly insignificant amount of gasoline that

had been just in case the first approach failed went up with an explosion that singed the cameraman's face as *Valiant Vivia* roared in flames toward him and he held his ground, knowing he had the footage of a lifetime, praying a little but not even thinking of dead men inside and she came to a halt in smoke and flames not two hundred feet from him and he was still grinding when the meat wagon and the fire trucks screamed up the strip to start throwing foam.

The operations officer was an ex-pilot, invalided off flight duty with flak in his lower back near the spine. It had taken a lot of pull to even stay on active duty. He was cheering along with the others when *Valiant Vivia* began to slow. And when she blossomed he felt the cheer die in his throat to be replaced with bitterness.

"They had it made," he said. "They had it made. So damned close." Because he knew no one could live through the explosion, through the sea of flames sweeping over her.

Firefighters heard the machine-gun rounds going off in the blaze and they stayed there, pouring on the foam until she was extinguished.

The operations officer was right, on all counts.

TEN

CICILY Smith had known what she had to do from the day she overheard Vivia Wilder talking with Mark. The question was how? At first her pride had been hurt. The realization that she was being pitied was a devastating blow. To think that he was going along with her enthusiastic plans for an early wedding merely because he felt obligated to her. It caused a pain that, at times, she found so horrible that she sought her room and tried to weep it out of her system.

She tried to put herself in Mark's position. She could not believe that he would sacrifice his own happiness. But a woman knows when a man does not love her. Doesn't she? Could she make sense of all this?

As the war came swiftly to an end, on the wings of dramatic developments, Mark withdrew into himself. So

he had been right. The top-secret hint he'd received about a powerful new weapon ending it all quickly had done just that. But so what? He was pleased that no more men would die, that American soldiers would not have to fight armed women and children on the outskirts of Tokyo. But in Mark there was a dullness that he could not dispel. There were times when Cicily's cheer grated on him, times when he wanted to be alone to brood, and to remember. He shrugged off her sunny efforts to get him working again, ignored the neatly stacked pile of paper, the ready pens and pencils on his bedside table. Many times when she was in his hospital room he just stared out the window. Not even the announcement of unconditional surrender lifted his spirits.

"Boy, you're not much fun anymore," Cicily remarked on the afternoon when a hospital ship sailed into Pearl Harbor, the ship that would take him to Mare Island.

"No, I guess not," he answered, as if he really didn't care.

"What would you say, Mark, if I didn't go to California?" she asked. The time had come. She couldn't put it off any longer. She had to know for sure.

He looked at her quickly, his eyes squinting. "Travel conditions are not the best," he said. "It would be a hard trip."

"Oh, I'm not worried about that," she said. "I was just wondering."

He was silent.

"After all, you'll be very busy," she said. "And they tell me finding a place to stay would be sheer hell." She was giving him every opening. All he had to say was "I want you to come, Cicily." But he was silent.

"After all, the war's over," she said. "It's time we stopped being emotional and started getting back to normal."

It was so unlike Cicily that he was stunned.

"Daddy's going to be coming home. He's had a rough war too."

Please, Mark, please, ask me to come, Cicily thought.

"Whatever you think," he said, his voice reflecting so little concern that it was a knife to her heart. The way he said it, more than anything else, confirmed her worst fears. She'd seen what she wanted to see. She'd gone after it directly and honestly. The hell of it was that she

could still have him. He was simply too honorable to renege on a promise. She could go to California, marry him. She'd make him a good wife and probably, because she'd be a good wife, he'd come to love her again. And then there'd always be a ghost in the house. And she was a Smith woman, and Smith women didn't live with ghosts. And then, too, damnit, she loved the idiot and that love was big enough to take his happiness into account too.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I guess I'll let the navy worry about that," he said.

"It won't take forever," she said. "They'll fit you with a new foot. You'll be walking in no time. You can go back to work."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"You can come back here."

"Cicily, are you telling me you're not coming to California at all?" he asked.

"It's so darned crowded. What would you think of living here?"

"And do what?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have to worry. No one will expect you to really work, Mark."

"Hey, I'm not a hopeless cripple. It's only a foot."

Ah, so that was the right direction, she thought. "Well, you've done your part, and I have plenty of money, Mark. I'll have more. We could live in the house with Daddy."

"Cicily—"

She cut him off. "Maybe," she said brightly, "you could write a book. One of those blood-and-thunder war novels."

"It's not my type of thing," he said. "I have my work, Cicily."

"Haven't noticed you working very hard at it," she said, looking meaningfully at the stack of untouched paper. "You've changed, Mark. I'm not sure I like the change."

Hell, yes, I've changed, he was thinking, and she was getting dangerously close to hitting below the belt. What did she expect of him? He still had skin grafts healing. He was minus a foot, his good foot, and the left son-of-a-bitch still itched.

But this was Cicily, and she'd been so dedicated to him, had gone all those sleepless nights to take care of him. He

owed her and— "Don't mind me. Just that I feel a little sorry for myself, I guess. I'll come out of it."

"Oh, sure," she said.

"I guess I'll go back to the paper. We can find a place. My mother is quite old. I need to be near her and, although I don't want to sound ghoulish about it and I certainly wish her many more years, she is old, and it's a nice house, Cicily."

"Right next door to Liz Wilder's family, right?" she asked. "Wouldn't that be nice?" Her voice went syrupy sweet.

"You have no reason to sound like that," he said.

"Maybe you can get in touch with good old Liz and have her come to Mare Island to take care of you," she said, batting her eyes at him.

"Cicily, what are you trying to say?" he asked.

She shrugged. "I guess I'm trying to start a fight with you," she said.

"Why?"

"Level?"

"Level," he said. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

Then why don't you level with me? she thought.

"I'm having second thoughts, I guess."

"Cicily, whatever you want. Just say it."

"Okay. You're a big boy and you can take it, I guess. Mark, I think I got carried away by the emotionalism of it all. Brave war correspondent going out on the front lines with the Marines and all that rot."

Rot? Rot?

"You're all right. You'll do fine, but I look at you now and see—" She fell silent. She couldn't say it. An ocean of tears seemed to be backed up behind her nose.

"See what? A cripple?"

"You said it, not I."

"Is that the way it is? You want out?"

"I frankly don't know. Do you?"

He had his opening. Why didn't he *speak*?

"Whatever you say, Cicily."

"Oh, damn," she said. "I can't go through my life with a man who can say only, 'Whatever you want, Cicily.' I don't think I can face living in a crowded apartment in San Francisco. Look, what do you say we give it a few months? You go on back and get fixed up. Go back to work. Work things out in your mind."

"It's not me that's mixed up," he said.

"Oh? Well, let's say it's me, then. Okay?"

He turned away. He didn't know quite how to feel. Down underneath was resentment. Why hadn't the flighty little wench spoken sooner, before he gave a verbal Dear Jane to the finest girl he'd ever known? And, perversely, he was wondering why.

"Put it on the table, Cicily," he said, looking back. "Why the sudden change?"

"Well, I told you you're no fun anymore."

"I never was much fun."

"But what it boils down to," she said, knowing that she had to do it, end it, "is that when I marry I want a whole man." But, oh, my darling, she thought, I do not mean your foot. I mean I must have your whole heart.

He felt something sink down inside him. He'd never be a whole man again. He'd left more than his foot on the islands.

"Okay," he said. "I guess that says it all, doesn't it?"

"No hard feelings?" she asked lightly.

"No, no."

"Well, look, I'll stay until they're ready to put you on the ship."

"No, there's no need for that. Go on home and get the place ready for Daddy."

"Oh, no trouble. They'll load you tomorrow."

"I don't want to put you to any more trouble, Cicily. Let's just say good-bye now."

"Yes, I guess that would be best," she said. She rose. She bent and pecked him on the cheek. "Take care."

"You, too."

"Good-bye, Cicily."

"Bye, then."

She stood in the hallway for a moment. Smith women did not weep in hospital corridors.

He was rolled out in a wheelchair the next day, and moved to an ambulance. It was a pleasantly warm day and the clouds were white and beautiful. She stood behind flowering bushes, watching, having been there for an hour, waiting. She saw him say something to one of the corpsmen lifting him, saw the litter disappear into the ambulance. She stood there, the aroma of the flowers lost

on her, until the ambulance disappeared, heading for the harbor.

At home, there was one more thing she had to do. It took her a long, long time to compose the letter, and when it was finished and given to a houseboy to post she went down to the beach and walked for a long, long time. She wondered if one of those ships low on the horizon were his. She walked until she was very tired and then she made her way back to the house. She told the houseboy she was not hungry. Her father was not yet home, her mother out. The house was huge and empty and in spite of the pleasant heat there seemed to be a chill. She went to her room and sat on the bed. After a while she read his letters through once, put them with his picture in a small box, secured it with old ribbons, and placed it on a closet shelf.

She could, she thought, still fly over, be there when he arrived. The thought warmed her. And then she shook her head. Smith women did not grovel and crawl. Smith women knew how to lose, even if it meant a house forever empty, even when it meant that each day would be an emptiness to be filled with forced activity and each night a time for painful regret. She had put her life away in a small box tied with old, yellowed ribbons. Someday she would have to pretend to live.

This thought shocked her, for it came to her that she'd been utterly stupid. She'd given up the only man she wanted because she did not want to force him to live a lie, but she hadn't considered the obvious. For now it would be she who lived a lie. She would eventually marry—Smith women married and produced grandchildren, that's just the way it was—and it would then be she who lived a lie.

"Well, Cis," her father said, when he arrived a few days later. "It's over and they won't be needing old war-horses like me much longer. It'll be nice, in a way, the three of us here at home."

"Yes," she said.

She'd changed, her father was thinking. Grown up. There was a more mature beauty about her. The youthful flightiness was gone.

"It's a big house," he said. "Plenty of room for you and Mark."

There'd been no chance for her mother to tell him, to warn him.

"Oh," she said, "it's all off with Mark. You'll have to wait a little longer to hear the patter of little feet, Dad."

Well, he'd liked Mark well enough, but it didn't worry him. The war was over and there were a lot of fine young men, many of them right there on the island. In fact, he'd asked her mother to put a few names on the list for the combination coming home and war's end party. Smith women married young.

ELEVEN

DURING the presidential campaign of 1944 the Republicans, in desperation, tried to make political hay of a ride taken on a government aircraft by F.D.R.'s little dog, Fala, yelling that King Franklin had used taxpayers' money to give Fala an excursion. F.D.R. turned the incident against them with good humor. The greatest campaigner of all time simply talked to the American people in that cultured, fatherly voice, barely refraining from chuckling.

"These Republicans," he said, "not content with attacks on me, on my wife, on my sons, now attack my *littul* dog Fala."

The American people were able during those united days, to separate wheat from chaff. With a balance, a sense of what was right and what was wrong—hell, they liked Fala—they sent Tom Dewey back to New York and got on with the business of whupping the Japs and Nazis. Never before had the nation seemed so nearly one entity. Never before had government worked so closely with the masses. Government soon learned that if a new law or a new policy was a good one, it would be supported. And if it wasn't, was merely some pipe dream from the great bureaucratic pipe then a way would be found to quickly circumvent it and get on with the job.

In the armed services an iron discipline was possible because the saddest sack in the rear rank of the last squad in the last platoon saw the need for it. But if things got too chickenshit that sad sack found a way to wade through

and make things more sensible. In the days when a slip of the lip might have, indeed, resulted in the sinking of a ship, lips were zipping tightly, but in the last days of the war when there wasn't a Jap ship east of the home islands such a secrecy was just too damned silly. It was no task at all for an old Pacific hand like Vivia, with contacts on every island west of Oahu, to get word to another old Pacific hand with friends all over the Pacific that she, Vivia, was going to arrive on Tinian in the late evening of August 8.

Liz, who had been going about her work in something of a daze, seized upon the impending visit. It would give her something to do. She knew from her talk with Clay that he was on a mission and from her stay on the island she knew the approximate time that the 29's would be returning. She left her office early. Even if she could find no reason for her own happiness, she could still brighten one airman's day.

Since good-looking nurses didn't hang around the airfield too often, she didn't lack for willing help. In fact, she received royal treatment, was escorted to the control tower so that she could have a good view of the landings. She was there when radio contact was made with the flight leader of the returning monsters. She saw the men in the tower begin to count when the planes came into view, formations tight and neat. Heads nodded, one man ticked off numbers on his fingers.

"Oh, hell," a man said.

"You make it two missing?" the officer in charge asked.

"Two."

He turned to a radio operator. "Heard from Iwo?"

The radioman went to work. The bombers began to land. She could feel the tension as the first came in, for he'd sustained some damage. A wheel blew on impact but, he rocked down the long strip coming to a slow stop, and then the others began making routine landings.

Liz had been handed a pair of issue binoculars. "I don't see *Valiant Vivia*," she said.

"We haven't heard from Iwo," the officer said. "Your guy on *Vivia*?"

"My future brother-in-law," she said casually, unconcerned.

"You got Iwo yet?" the officer asked.

"Yes, sir," the radio said. "Bad news, sir."

She would not worry. No more could happen. She smiled at the officer. He looked a bit undecided. "Okay, let's have it," he said.

"Hensley lost his wheels and went in for a belly landing."

There was a long silence. The officer sighed. "All right, damnit."

"She burned, sir."

"You are not talking about *Valiant Vivia*," Liz stated.

"No survivors, sir," the radio operator said.

"Ma'am, I'm sorry," the officer said. "I'm sorry as hell."

She was taking a cigarette that he was offering, her hands shaking. No. On top of all the others this was too much. "Isn't it ever going to end?" she asked the world in general.

"Listen, Commander," the officer said, "we'll double-check. We'll make sure. Where can I reach you?"

She told him. She waited in her office until the totally unacceptable had to be accepted and then she was back at the airfield late in the day, feeling now as if she were only a hollow shell, devoid of feeling, of any emotion, any hope. She watched the big, luxurious four-motored transport land and then saw the flashbulbs popping. Bob Hope was big stuff. He waved from the top of the ramp and came down all smiles and wisecracks and then she saw Vivia, her blond head swiveling, her smile seeming to light up the early evening. Liz waved and called out. She had come prepared.

Vivia, so full of life, so young, so untouched by the war, was ecstatic to be so near her Clay. She was asking questions even as she hugged her sister, looking around for Clay.

"He had a mission," Liz said. "Come on, you'll stay with me."

"Oh, we have quarters. No need to crowd you."

"Just for tonight."

Vivia thought Liz looked extraordinarily tired. She got into the jeep that Liz handled smartly, in spite of her tired, drawn look. Vivia did most of the talking. She was happy about life in general, about being with Hope, about singing with Les Brown, about seeing Clay. Liz was grimly silent. Once they were in her quarters Liz immediately prepared a hypodermic needle, pushing liquid up to bubble out the end, ridding the tube of air.

"What in the ever-lovin' blue-eyed world do you think your doing?" Vivia asked indignantly.

"Honey, it's an epidemic," Liz said, mopping a spot on Vivia's arm with medicated cotton.

"Oh, shit," Vivia sad. "That's the only thing I don't like about this whole thing, being a human pincushion."

"Unfortunately, this is going to offer only temporary protection," Liz said.

"Liz, what's with you?"

"Just relax."

She fixed coffee. "No booze?" Vivia asked.

"Not with the shot," Liz said, waiting for the sedative to begin taking effect.

"No one is immune to this particular epidemic," Liz said. "Not even you, Vivian Ruth."

"You're scaring the shit out of me," Vivia said.

"Feeling sleepy?"

"Yeah. Can't understand it. Had a lot of sleep on the plane. When's Clay coming?"

"Vivian Ruth, there is only one way. Hard, quick." She took a deep breath. "He's not coming."

"They've transferred him?" Vivia asked, shaking her head to dispel the drowsiness.

"Vivian, if I had any tears left at all I'd weep for you."

"Liz? Liz? What the hell?"

"He's dead. Your Clay is dead."

Once when Liz was visiting relatives on the ranch in the valley she'd heard a frightening sound in the night. Running to her aunt's bed, she'd been told that it was only a rabbit, probably feeling the claws or the fangs of a predator. The sound Vivia made now was akin to that sound, a study in pure agony. Even the massive sedative administered in advance took a long, long time to deaden the first real pain Vivian Ruth Wilder had ever known. Liz had been right. Vivia never took things with the normal amounts of emotion. With her, perhaps because of her very vitality, her love of life, things were magnified.

Vivia slept into the midmorning. She slept while the second "Little Boy" bomb charred the Japanese city of Nagasaki. When she woke, she said that she wanted to know, and when Liz started telling it—she'd had more details after Vivia was safely asleep—she screamed and wept wildly, refusing to hear the rest. One of the doctors

came and agreed with Liz that another sedative was advisable.

"Can't keep her knocked out the rest of her life, though," he said. "She's got to face it cold turkey sooner or later."

It was an eventful day. The Russians declared war on Japan and began a land grab in Manchuria. Liz met Bob Hope. He came to her quarters. "How's the kid?" he asked.

The kid was staring at the walls. Her reaction had been, Liz thought, queer. From an emotional display of grief she had gone into silent, staring quiet.

"Couldn't be tougher," Hope said, "happening so near the end. Listen, tell her to take her time. We're here for a few days. If she misses the first couple of shows, okay."

Why couldn't she be happier when, a day later, on August 10, 1945, the Japanese agreed to meet all terms for surrender? Mark, the son-of-a-bitch, had been right once again. Okinawa had been the last island. The Japs had only one reservation. The emperor must be retained as head of state. The war was put on hold while the Allies debated. The Russians took advantage and moved into North Korea in a development that was scarcely even noticed, because the world held its breath.

Liz came into her quarters to find Vivia coming out of the shower. "Hi," she said, "what's up?"

"I have a show to do," Vivia said.

"Are you sure? Sure you want to do it?"

There was a smile, but it wasn't the old smile. This was a new Vivia, suddenly older.

Makeup hid the bags under her eyes. There were cheers and whoops as she swept onstage. Watching the show, as a shower marched the length of the runways and pelted off the gleaming wings of the now suddenly useless monsters, Liz Wilder wondered what would happen to her now, to this girl who sang so beautifully. But she could not manage tears, not even when Vivia sang the song that had been her and Clay's special love song. She lit a cigarette and a fat drop of rain dampened it in the middle. They'd never been much alike, she and Vivian Ruth, but now they had something in common.

Astoundingly, Vivia laughed at Hope's monologue. But her eyes, like the eyes of the wounded men, the men

missing legs, arms, were not laughing. And then Vivia was back.

"One more song, fellas," she said, as the men whooped and cheered the vision in silver lamé. "It's a very special song."

She would allow herself to remember, just this once. Even as she stood there, a bit damp still from the rain, she remembered, while they were in rehearsal, when Les asked, "What's that you're humming?"

"Oh, nothing, really."

"Give it to me again."

"Actually, it's a little tune that keeps running around in my head," she said. "It's nothing, really." But he insisted. She hummed. It was the thing she'd begun to hear the first day she walked down the street in San Francisco, discovering for the first time that holding hands could be the deepest emotional experience.

"You wrote that?" Les asked. "Man, it's great."

"Damn, Les, it's a waltz."

"Yeah, but listen." He hummed. He and an arranger worked with her.

"This is a very, very special song," she told them now, there on the world's largest airfield at the end of the world's largest war, "and it's the very last song I'll ever sing." No one knew what she meant. "It's for a special guy who didn't make it. It's for all the guys who didn't make it."

And the band was riffing, a cute, happy little jazz waltz and her smile was a blaze for it was almost as if he were there for one last time, and she could see his face and she was hearing it for the last time. Brass and reeds and the muted trumpets silver in her ears and she was burning it all behind her, all the hope, all the happiness, sending it out in one gloriously inspired performance, the first and last time she'd ever sing for Clay in public, or anywhere, the last time she'd ever allow herself to know the joy of being a part of a big, fat, glorious sound, for there wasn't any room for happiness in the world.

The band riffing down into silence and she was blowing kisses. "I'll always love you," she said, her voice catching, "each and every one of you."

In the dressing room she removed the silver lamé and cut it into small ribbons of gleaming material and left it

strewn on the floor. The men on a navy plane heading east were only too happy to give her a ride.

"Well, here's to it," Liz Wilder said, holding aloft the last warm beer. "Whatever it is."

"You don't fight a global war," Mark had said, "and come out of it unscathed. You can tell Vivia that. She's got to realize that the war wasn't organized for her own special benefit, just to give her audiences. Tell her what Ira Hayes told his buddy before the Iwo landing: 'You're going to get it, buddy boy. You're going to get it good.'"

So she'd gotten it. And good old solid Liz had gotten it in a different way. And what now? Hell, there'd be no lack of work. Like those men who'd beat on the arms of their wheelchairs yelling, "Girls, girls, girls." They'd have to have care for months, years. There'd be American men scattered all over the globe for many years to come and they'd suffer tropical disease and accidents and they'd need medical care. They'd need nurses. But, as she thought about it, she wasn't at all sure she could muster a proper interest in malaria or a broken toe, not after all she'd seen. The alternative, however, was an empty apartment in San Francisco. The war was going to be one helluva tough act to follow.

Epilogue

Summer, 1948

LIZ cradled a flat package carefully under one arm and got out of the car she'd parked in front of the old house with the new paint. She waved to her mother, in her own yard next door watering flowers, then ran up the steps to her house. Her first stop was the nursery. Marcus Clay Fillmore was sleeping peacefully. She opened the door to the study. Mark had his feet up on the desk and was staring moodily out the window into a San Francisco day of perfect blue skies and gentle temperature.

"The monster give you any trouble?" she asked.

"Slept like a baby," Mark said.

She put the flat package down carefully and bent to kiss him. "Problems?"

In the skies over Berlin the RAF and the air force were flying again, their cargoes quite different these days. Instead of high explosives the huge cargo planes carried food and supplies, all the necessities of daily living for a city under Russian blockade.

"I was thinking of what old Blood and Guts Patton said, or is supposed to have said, just as the war was ending."

She was still his prime sounding board, and she knew he'd been having trouble finding just the right words for an editorial. "Ummm?" she asked.

"He said, 'Give me a couple of weeks and I'll have a war going with the sons-of-bitches,' meaning the Russians. All he wanted was Ike's go-ahead and he said he'd lick their asses back behind the Russian border where they belonged. He wanted to do it while we had the army over there to do the job."

"Mark, is it that serious?"

"Oh, there won't be a big war, not yet. There's still the bomb." He reached for his pipe. He'd given up cigarettes. He worried a lot about his health. He had occasional stiffness and assorted aches from the old shrapnel wounds. The jungle rot between his toes would clear up for a while, under new treatments and then flare up again.

"Things aren't as simple as they were," he went on, puffing the pipe into life. "Once you could easily tell the bad guys from the good guys. The job we had to do was clear-cut, simple. We had only to kill enough Japs and Germans to get the Axis to surrender. We had a job to do and we did it. Men did it. Men waded a thousand years of water at Tarawa in the face of deadly fire. Men crawled through volcanic ash at Iwo. It was rough, too rough. When it was over we were all sick of death and killing and we thought we'd made the world a good place. The world had suffered a grievous wound, and time was needed for it to heal. But some wounds never heal."

"The wounds you can't see," she said. He nodded. There was a comfortable silence. Then she remembered. "Hey, come along into the living room. I have something I want you to hear."

She had heard the song three years previously, on Tinian. It was a happy little jazz waltz, and it was delivered by a mature, throaty voice. The band was simply great, crisp, clean, hard-driving.

"A happy little song," Mark said, as the record ended and they both fell into their own silent thoughts.

"Some wounds never heal," Liz said, thinking of Vivia and so many others; E.O. and a scratchy Glenn Miller record, Ethel Johnston and all the men who had crossed the operating table onboard the *Solicitude*. All of them, the dead, the wounded, the living. Cicily Smith. Perhaps her wounds had healed. She'd been young, young like Vivia. But when the letter had come to her on Tinian the wound was still fresh, the letter written in blood. She could still remember it almost word for word.

Go to him and take damned fine care of him or I'll come back into his life and take him away from you for good next time.

She rose, put the record on again. Would Vivia always sound so breathlessly young? That, too, that song. It had been written in happiness but sung in agony and how much had it cost her to record it?

For a long time it had seemed that Vivia would never sing again, that the pain of remembering the only true happiness she'd ever known would be unbearable. Liz did not know why Vivia had changed her mind, but she

had heard the story from Rudy Blake, who conducted the hard, crisp band on Vivia's recordings.

Vivia had entered the nightclub unnoticed while the band was rehearsing. There should be a law against nightclubs being open during daylight hours. Underneath the outside shrubbery were crumpled cigarette packs, scraps of paper, dead butts. The stucco peeled from the walls. Inside was the smell of ancient beer and booze and old cigarettes and cigars. She wore a tan, two-piece suit with a pink blouse. She towered on spike heels, carried a neat little tan purse, a shapely, blond girl with a blank face and expressionless eyes. She didn't recognize the tune, but it swung. She stood below the bandstand and listened, head cocked to one side. One foot began to tap. When it was over she said, "The trumpets are still a little ragged."

"Yeah," Rudy said. "Look, trumpets, this ain't no friggin' race to see who gets finished first." Then he turned.

"One of yours, Rudy?" Vivia asked.

"Hey, kid," he yelled, leaping down to bear hug her. "Man, where the hell you been?"

She shrugged. "New band?"

"Brand new. We'll work it out."

"Sure you will," she said.

"Listen, kid, you just dropped out of sight. After singing with Bob Hope—" He squeezed her again. "Gee, it's good to see you. What's up? What are you doing?"

"Looking for work," she said, not at all sure.

"Wanta run that by again?" he asked.

"I'm asking you for a job, if you'll have me," she said.

"Don't shit me, Vivia."

"No shit. Just a humble request. If you don't have a singer, how about you audition me?"

"Look around, kid. It's worse than the dump we started in. The band is made up of kids. Some of them don't half read. The war killed a lot of good musicians and the rest, those who are half good, can make more money playing with a small group and making records or working the studios and never stepping onto a bus. Sidemen who can't clean their own instruments want leader's pay. Travel costs are high as hell. I don't know what's going to happen. The whole thing might fall right on top of me—"

"Us?" she asked. "On us?"

He took her arm, called out, "Take five," to the band, led her to the bar. "Look, I almost stayed in the air corps. I was playing with one of the finest bands I've ever heard, what was left of the Miller outfit. Called themselves the Airmen of Note. We had an arrangement of Ivy that was super shit. This band? Hell, you heard it."

"It can be polished," she said.

"Yeah, in a hootch joint with a no-talent leader. Let's face it, you're good, Vivia. You can write your own ticket. I can't pay you enough."

"Try me."

"You're serious?"

"Never more."

"Okay, get the frame in the game then."

He called the band together, handed out sheets. "Hey, Rudy," a boy in his teens complained, "we ain't even seen this one."

Rudy rolled his eyes toward the dim ceiling. "Just listen. Pick it up, okay?"

The piano started it with a little doo-dum, doo-dum beat. The piano man could read. She held her sheet and had trouble seeing the notes. She wasn't sure she could do it, had promised herself never to sing again after that last tribute to Clay there on Tinian. Two years and she had not sung a note. But she could feel it and as the piano doo-dummed she began to get the rhythm. She'd always been best on love songs, she wasn't bad on a bounce tune, but, oh, God, could she sing, could she ever feel the music again?

Two years of being alone. And why was today different? Because of Jeff Walters?

He'd knocked on her apartment door and when she opened it, wobbling a bit from three martinis, there he was, neat and clean and handsome in a gray business suit.

"Never seen you out of uniform," she said.

"I'm looking for a girl who was the sweetheart of the Pacific," he said, before he hugged her. "Hi, Vivia. I had the devil's own time finding you. Finally remembered Mark Fillmore married your sister and located you through him."

"Come in, Jeff," she said. The momentary lift of seeing a familiar and dear face had passed, leaving only the usual emptiness. "Coffee?"

"Thought you hated the stuff."

"I hate a lot of things."

Seated, looking at her with concern, he lied. "You're looking fantastic."

"You always were a polished liar," she said, but there was a small smile, only a hint of sunrays in it. "What about you? Are you governor yet?" She wouldn't have known. She didn't read newspapers, didn't listen to the news.

"Only a lowly state senator," he said. "Have to start somewhere."

"So you're up in Sacramento."

"When we're in session. I'm in Oakland the rest of the time. Got into a small business over there. I'm thinking of running for a congressional seat next year."

"You'll be elected," she said.

"I wish I were so sure."

"Old Jeff Fix-It? Sure. No one can stop you."

"Any more of that coffee?" He rose. "No, I'll get it."

She noticed a slight limp, and as he came out of the tiny kitchen she pointed to his legs, raised her eyebrows in question.

"Not bad," he said. "Just a little souvenir of Okinawa."

"Well, you and Bill couldn't rest until you got reassigned to sea duty. Had to give up the cushy jobs in Hawaii and go fight Nips." She hadn't thought of Bill Partier in a long time. "How is Bill, by the way?"

A shadow crossed his face and he paused, midstride. "You didn't hear?"

Oh, no, not him too, she thought.

"We were on the *Bismarck Sea*," Jeff said.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

He sat down, his right leg stiffly extended. "I tried to get to him, Vivian. They kept telling me he was dead, and I couldn't believe it. They were hitting us hard—"

"*Kamikazies*?"

He nodded. "I just couldn't believe it. I kept expecting him to walk into the hospital and say 'Look, boy, you've been away long enough,' you know?"

"It seemed I would have known, somehow," she mused. "I didn't feel a thing." And there was protest in her voice.

"He can't be dead, Jeff. I'd have known."

"It's trite as hell, and it helps the dead not even a little bit, but I think it's at least partly true that a man is never really dead as long as he is remembered."

For a long moment she held the tears, and then all at once they came. It was the first time she'd wept since Tinian. She was seeing Clay the way he'd looked that first day in the soda shop, and for the first time in a long time she began to hear the music in her mind, beginning far away and low and soft as she relived the walk through the wintertime streets of San Francisco, remembered the way he smiled, the feel of his hand, the way he wore his hat straight and true and not like a drug store or movie airman in some "B" film. And she realized she'd been doing her best to eradicate Clay from her life, to forget him, to erase a pain that would never leave, that would, perhaps, be dulled, but that would always be there to spring up suddenly at a familiar phrase of music, a key word.

"Sorry," Jeff said. "I thought you would have heard."

"Jeff, would you be terribly offended if I asked you to leave?"

"I understand," he said. "May I see you again?"

"I'd like that," she said quickly, without having to think.

And now the piano was going doo-dum, doo-dum, doo-dum, and she hit it on the nose with a voice that came out a bit strange, as if it were not her own, and then settled down and nailed the lyrics—"Do I love you, do I, doesn't one and one make two?"—and Rudy was grinning at her.

For she remembered what Jeff had said, not speaking of Clay, but of Bill. And if it applied to Bill, it applied to Clay.

"He is alive as long as he's alive in my heart. He is there, young, and handsome, and loving. And even when I'm old he'll be there, always strong and ageless and alive."

"My God," said a young trumpet player when the song tailed off Vivian's huge, distinctive voice and went down and down into piano doo-dums and ended.

FROM THE STREETS
AND NIGHTCLUBS OF SAN FRANCISCO
TO THE WHITE SAND BEACHES OF HAWAII—
FROM A GLISTENING HOSPITAL SHIP
TO THE EMBATTLED SHORES OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS—
A SWEEPING NOVEL OF PASSION AND DESTINY,
LOVE AND WAR

*Vivia Wilder became the sweetheart of the Pacific
as she sang her heart out with a USO band. Her looks, her smile,
and her songs reminded the troops what they were fighting for—
the kind of world where the childhood dreams of a talented,
beautiful, blond singer could come true...a world where love
still counted...a world where Vivia's sister, Navy nurse Liz Wilder,
could have a home and family in peace...
where journalist Mark Fillmore could write about more than
bombs, guns and battleships.*

*Exciting, romantic, devastatingly real,
here is a wonderful World War II novel about the men and women
who struggled during the turbulent years...*

of LOVE and BATTLE



2 8 6 1 0



ISBN 0-345-28610-3